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MIDDLE-EARTH

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Sid Meier's epic!

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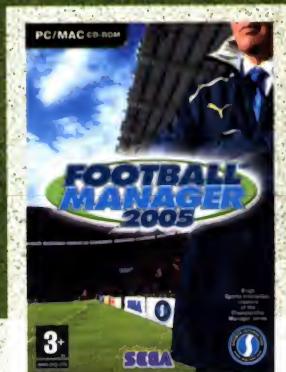
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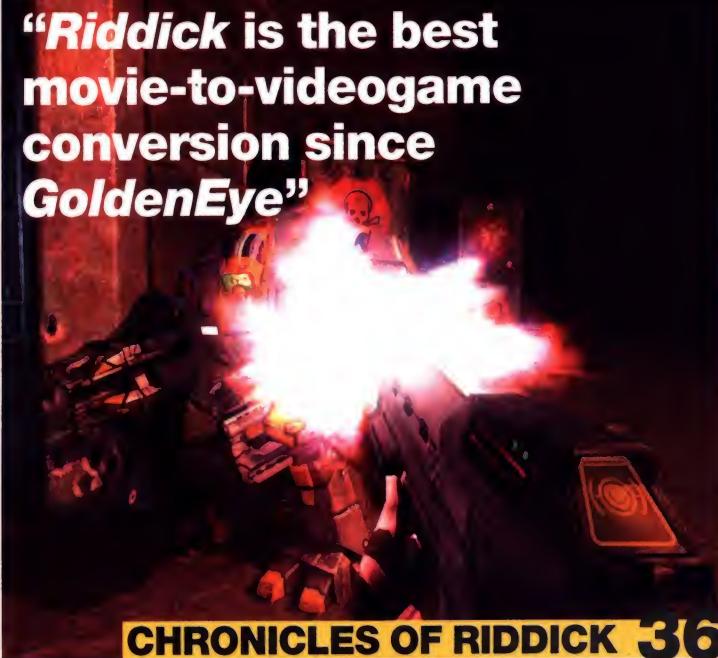
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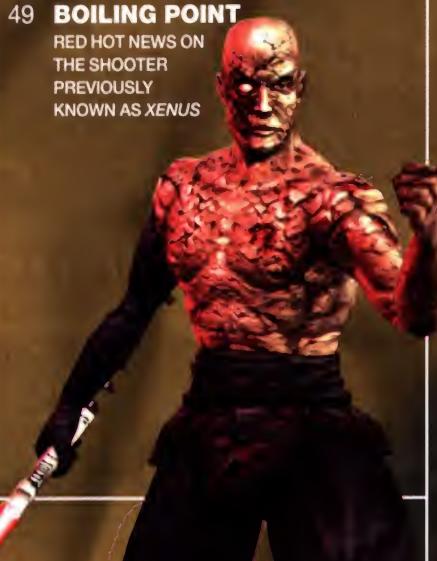
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TINY COMPO Correctly answer this month's cover question and you could win some goodies. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: Tiny Compo (149), PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London NW1 6FP. The first correct entry plucked out of the hat wins a mystery prize. Closing date: December 8, 2004. The winner of our November Tiny Compo (147) was Peter Ives from the scarred battle-grounds of Coventry, who wins a bunch of games for knowing what 'Quad Damage' is in Quake. Congrats and hugs x

GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before the closing date will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility cannot be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK or employees of Future or its affiliated companies, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition. Phew! **TEXT COMPETITION ENTRIES:** In order to enter this issue's competitions, you should send the keyword (for example, PCZSWITCH), to 83125, with your full answer, name and address. Misspelt keywords are not counted. All entries for this issue must be received by December 8, 2004. Future Publishing will not be liable for any delays in the receipt of any SMS messages as delivery is subject to effective transmission from your network operator. Texts will cost 50p plus your standard operator (text messaging) charge. Upon closure of this issue's comps, Future Publishing will have no further obligation thereafter to forward any unread or unsent messages to users or any other party. By replying YES, you agree to receive text messages from PC ZONE and other Future publications regarding future services and promotions, as well as market research run or conducted by Future Publishing and other related or associated businesses. You can unsubscribe at any time by replying STOP to any message sent.

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COMES ALIVE™



Morro-winds of change

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

Hours will be wasted, character points gained and social lives lost...

■ GOBSMACKED ADVENTURER Will Porter

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

PUBLISHER TBA
DEVELOPER Bethesda
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Winter 2005
WEBSITE www.bethsoft.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's Bethesda's next epic free-roaming RPG
- It's huge. Although not as huge as before
- Over 1,000 NPCs going about their daily lives
- It's beautiful – absolutely beautiful

"1,000 NPCs will go about their business: eating, sleeping, working and stealing"

THE TRIUMPH

of *Morrowind* was that, during the many lost hours that so many of us devoted to it, it convinced us that it was a real place; as dauntingly huge as the world outside our actual houses, faithful to both cause and effect and as packed with strange, grey-skinned beings as the inhabitants of multi-storey car parks the length and breadth of Britain. *Oblivion* however, Bethesda's new offering, is set to go even further.

Within the beautiful sun-drenched visuals you see scattered around these pages, 1,000 NPCs will go about their everyday lives: eating, sleeping, reporting for work, shopping and (if they're broke) stealing from those better off than themselves. Each will be blessed with highly detailed facial animation so you'll know exactly what your peers think of you as you wander about town, joining



There's a far more medieval vibe to *Oblivion's* visuals.

guilds and befriending or murdering all those your plucky avatar meets.

Your tale begins with you languishing in an Imperial dungeon when an assassination attempt on the emperor, one Uriel Septim VII, causes him to leg it through your dank cells. After a gallant defence (and mortal wounding) of said emperor, you're entrusted with the glittery 'Amulet of Kings', your apparent devotion to the emperor resulting in you being charged with the quest to close the marble jaws of *Oblivion* – presumably a nasty vortex that's been spitting out evil in the forests, mountains, dungeons and towns of Uriel's kingdom.

The game is set to be smaller than its predecessor – partly because the hugely detailed surrounds of the land of Cyrodiil require a lot more development time

than previous *Elder Scrolls* efforts, and partly because the developer reckons that most (cough, console) gamers prefer shorter, denser games. This is not to say the game will be small – it'll still be massive – but it won't match the daunting enormity of *Morrowind*. Combat too has had a makeover, with backroom dice-rolling replaced with a far more active attack-and-block system governed by weapons, player strength, armour values and the like.

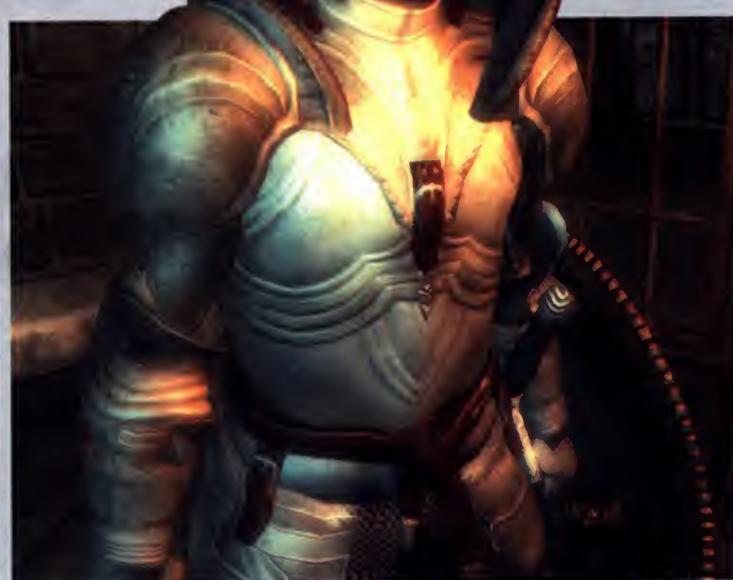
There's only ever a hair's breadth between streamlining and dumbing down. However, with Bethesda's pedigree and the love we hold for *Morrowind*, we reckon that's enough to hold onto in the hope that *Oblivion* will be the RPG we've all been praying for. **PC**



Almost makes you want to bow down and worship, doesn't it?



Rob, kill or befriend the humble peasants...



Combat will be more of a focus, and it'll be far grittier too.



The most beautiful roleplayer of all time?

WHERE EVIL LURKS

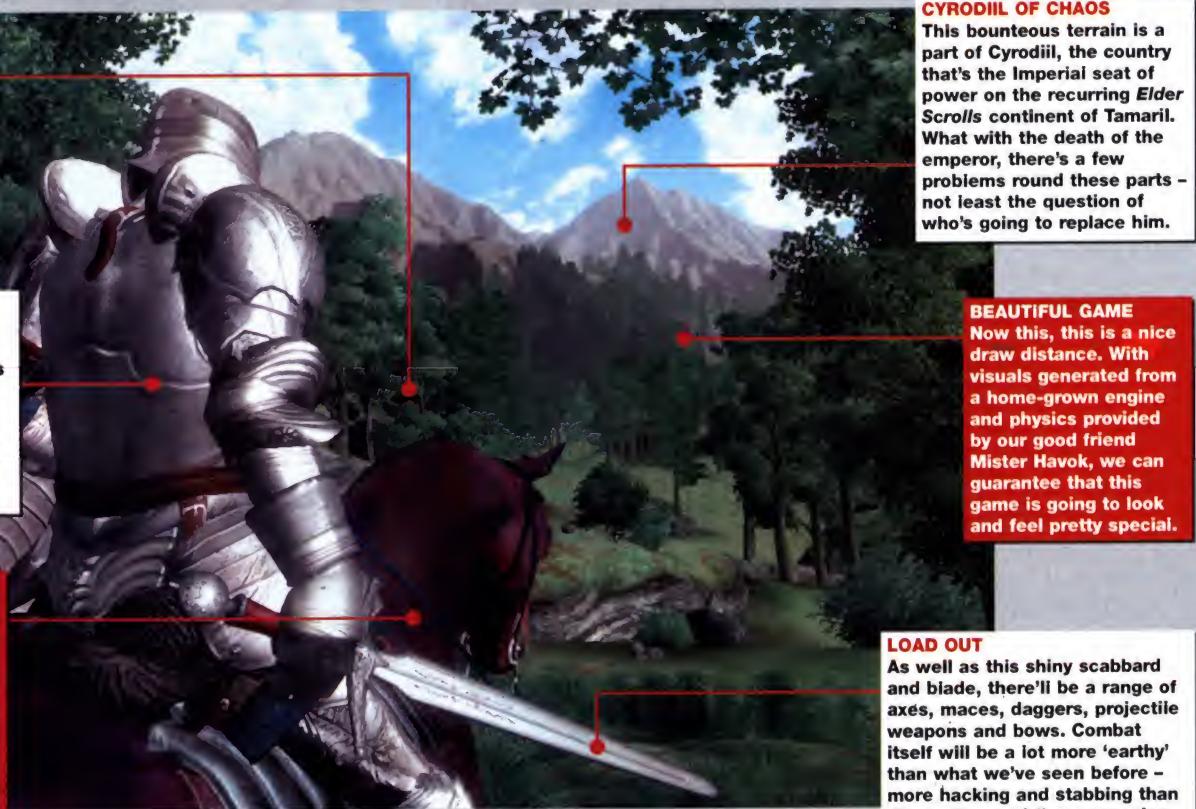
What kind of beasts live in a forest like this? We've been promised minotaurs, orcs, skeletons, demons and goblins, along with all manner of conventional animals like deer, skittering about and living out their free-roaming lives.

FACTION JACKSON

Your good-sir-knight can join (and eventually lead) any of at least six factions: the Fighter's Guild, the Mage's Guild, the Thieves' Guild, The Dark Brotherhood, the Arena Guild and the Nine Divine's Temple. Which way will you go? The choice is yours...

CLIPPERTY-CLOP

Every questing adventurer needs a steed on which to gallop and look windswept, and *Oblivion* happily delivers in spades. We doubt they'll do real horsey things like getting scared of plastic bags in bushes, kicking children and pretending not to understand what you're telling them – but that's probably a good thing.



CYRODIIL OF CHAOS

This bounteous terrain is a part of Cyrodiil, the country that's the Imperial seat of power on the recurring *Elder Scrolls* continent of Tamaril. What with the death of the emperor, there's a few problems round these parts – not least the question of who's going to replace him.

BEAUTIFUL GAME

Now this, this is a nice draw distance. With visuals generated from a home-grown engine and physics provided by our good friend Mister Havok, we can guarantee that this game is going to look and feel pretty special.

LOAD OUT

As well as this shiny scabbard and blade, there'll be a range of axes, maces, daggers, projectile weapons and bows. Combat itself will be a lot more 'earthy' than what we've seen before – more hacking and stabbing than dice-rolling and finger-crossing.



ALL THE NEWS, VIEWS AND RUMOURS FROM THE WORLD OF PC GAMING

BULLETIN

SYSTEM ERROR



■ NEWS WRITER Will Porter

▲ Life is full of missed opportunities. The other day I had the unique chance to shout "Kilroy, you're a wanker!" at Kilroy. Shamefully, the thought didn't even cross my mind until he was long gone. In much the same style as the time that I nearly saw a bear, it's now a forgotten dream – something beautiful that could have been, yet has now passed. This is why our lives need quicksave points. If only I had a mental F8 button then I could have insulted Kilroy again, and again and again. I could have seen that bear. I could have avoided gibbering like a fool in front of the opposite sex during my early (and late) teens.

Life should be more like games. How much better would everyday life be if we good just bring down a console and tap in 'IDCLIP'? When we wake up in the middle of the night, confused and half-convinced that the worrying dream we just had was real, wouldn't it be nice to have a 'TAB' key we could slap so we could get a reassuring "Mission Objectives: Go back to sleep" message? It would help no end, and should I ever be asked to design a new race of super-humans then it's certainly a function that I'd think about including.

Thinking about it, maybe my notorious lack of co-ordination is simply because I haven't been given the opportunity to invert my Y-axis? Or maybe I haven't got the right drivers installed... The mind boggles. Or something.

Anyway, enough babbling. This month my section contains some extremely good news, including a spiritual successor to *System Shock 2* (see right) and a new outing for the *Sam & Max* team (see page 25). Lap it up people – you know you want it.

SYSTEM REBOOT

PC GAMING TREMBLES AS IRRATIONAL ANNOUNCES *BIOSHOCK* – SPIRITUAL SUCCESSOR TO THE LEGENDARY *SYSTEM SHOCK 2*



Will scientists never learn?!

IN SECRET development for some three years, *BioShock* may not be an official *System Shock* sequel but its announcement has still sent a wave of excitement through the fan community.

The game swaps *SS2*'s corporate spaceship for a huge WW2 bunker complex that's been unearthed in the future, filled with bio-engineering equipment and genetic laboratories of dubious taste. Again, the place is littered with dead bodies and it's your eventual role to uncover the mysteries hidden in the genetically-tampered murk... and to scare yourself absolutely shitless.

Being made with the same heavily modified Unreal engine that *Tribes: Vengeance* used, the game sounds as if it'll have more than a few similarities to *STALKER*, in that the developers are trying to avoid heavy scripting when it comes to monsters. Instead, we'll be presented with various clones, experimentations and hybrids that operate on AI-bound instinct and natural stimuli – so there'll be a natural order present within the complex that you'll be intruding upon with your presence.

Three main varieties of horror will stalk these corridors: Drones (who feed on corpses and turn them into valuable



You think it's just some warped insect, until you see it's holding a gun...

parcels of DNA), Predators (who feed on the Drones) and Soldiers (who protect the Drones from getting munched by the Predators). You'll be running between all three though, as it's only through the Drones' all-corpse diet and resultant 'plasmid' excretion that you'll be able to mod yourself, *Deus Ex* style. Also, alongside your array of weaponry, you'll

be armed with a camera with which you'll be able to photograph all the beasties that you come across, like a cyberpunk version of Jade from *Beyond Good & Evil*, exposing all the weak spots in their bio-modified make-up.

We can't quite contain our excitement over *BioShock*, and can't help but think that the only reason it isn't an official *System Shock* sequel is the same legal dispute that's left budget releases of *System Shock 2* in limbo for so long. Never mind though, we know we're going to be terrified no matter what the title...



Green liquid is never a good thing.



System Shock 2: still worth playing.

- Publisher: TBA
- Developer: Irrational Games
- ETA: TBA
- Website: www.irrationalgames.com



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SPECIAL REPORT
Disabled gamers

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EMULATION ZONE
Nintendo's ill-fated Virtual Boy

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INDIE ZONE
Beautiful Hamsters

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PC ZONE CHARTS
Invasion of *The Sims*

But will it be as insanely difficult as before?

First Strike

HOT NEW SHOTS OF FORTHCOMING COMMANDOS FPS, STRIKE FORCE

As we reported back in our August issue, Pyro Studio's much respected WW2 strategy series *Commandos* is going first-person. It's not a straight shooter though, as you take control of

a squad made up of a Green Beret, spy and a sniper. Presumably you'll control them as you would in *Hidden and Dangerous* – planning assault tactics with their unique skills and sneaking

around various locations in France, Norway and Russia.

On your travels you'll be aiding and abetting La Resistance, kidnapping Nazi generals, sinking ships and generally irritating Hitler. What with the disastrous delay to *Champ Man 5*, publisher Eidos could really do with a hit – and from what we've seen so far they could well be on to one.

- Publisher: Eidos
- Developer: Pyro Studios
- ETA: Spring 2005
- Website: www.eidosinteractive.co.uk/gss/strikeforce/



Start timing those patrol paths.



Nazis: still evil.

GORDON'S ALIVE!

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT FOR THOSE LIVING UNDER ROCKS OR IN DEEP, DARK CAVES

Six days after this magazine hits the shelves *Half-Life 2* will be released. If you're reading this on any day after November 16 then for God's sake man, put PC ZONE down and play *Half-Life 2* instead – we won't be offended.

Amid Internet rumours that VU is pretty miffed at Valve and its online Steam delivery service (presumably because VU is only in line for boxed-copy

profits), Gordon Freeman will finally be free to wield his crowbar. After last year's non-release, the fabled leak and an ongoing court case between developer and publisher, it's great to report that the day of reckoning has finally come.

So, all the storms seem to have blown over, no doubt helped by the fact that the game is so amazingly good. Go out and play it people! Relish one of the greatest games of all time and then tell us what you think...

- Publisher: VU Games
- Developer: Valve Software
- ETA: November 16
- Website: www.valvesoftware.com



Hold on! Not long now.



Better physics than real life...



GOOD COP

LOTR fever sweeping through the office (again) with Mart's review of *The Battle For Middle-Earth*.



Our new offices have a drinks machine! And, we can blag copies of *Cross-Stitch Monthly*! And there's a place across the road that sells cheap sandwiches! Yay!

Will's San Franciscan adventure: sitting in a restaurant with Francis Ford Coppola (on the other side of the room), buying nerdy T-shirts and weeping with joy at the Skywalker Ranch.

BAD COP

Hill busting his (other) shoulder while stock car racing. No, we don't know why either.



Having to pretend that it's almost Christmas – when it really, really isn't.

The discs. Don't get us started on the discs, or Suzy will cry.

Good Cop: Capt. Ivan Danko (Arnold Schwarzenegger) Bad Cop: Det. Sgt. Art Ridzik (James Belushi) from *Red Heat* – that rubbish 1985 action film that was on BBC1 the other night.



While *World Racing* focussed on the simulation aspect, *World Racing 2* will put the fun of driving at centre stage and offer optimised arcade racing characteristics, a rich and varied range of mission modes, lively scenarios, ein abwechslungsreicher und vielseitiger Missions-Modus, lebhafte Szenarien, enhanced tuning options and a great variety of integrated-Möglichkeiten cars.

We're only guessing that the guy who translated the *World Racing 2* press release was in a bit of a hurry.

PC ZONE is the best!!

Shouted by a random man at Will while he, Prez and Deputy Art Ed Jamie were walking down New Oxford Street. It's always nice to hear compliments, but the lads were initially under the impression that they were being mugged...

ACCESS GRANTED

Pavel Barter knocks on the door of PC gaming's disabled community and asks whether developers are catering for their needs

AT ONE time or another, we've all been tortured by PC technical hiccups. Banjaxed speakers, faulty monitors, and coffee-soaked keyboards are one thing, but when faced with a game interface which is about as useful as lips on a chicken, you wonder if some developers intentionally try to make us weep.

However, consider for a moment the thousands of disabled gamers across the globe. Whether deaf, blind or physically impaired, these guys and gals are as crazy about gaming as the rest of us, but have to endure limited interaction on a daily basis. For them, many games are like nightclub VIP areas: they're alluring, but the bouncer's not letting anyone in.

At 64 years of age, Robert Zinda is a pensionable PC games fanatic. Zinda isn't exactly over the hill, more standing on top of it and blasting people off in a FPS frenzy, but his vintage years have earned him the nickname 'Moses' amongst young MMOG pretenders. Burning bushes are the least of his worries, though. Moses, you see, is completely deaf.

HEAR ME FRAG

"The deafness is definitely a handicap in shooting games like *Doom 3*, *Splinter Cell*, *Ghost Recon*, and so on," he writes. "I can't hear when I'm being shot at, or if monsters, soldiers or whatever, are coming at me from behind. Most of all, my problems are with games that are not subtitled like *Doom 3*. Online, people speak to each other, giving orders, or explaining what I'm supposed to do... I'm lost there. I have to wing it all alone and hope for the best."

All too often disabled gamers have to wing it, but in recent times the community has started to become more vocal with its complaints. Deafgamers.com rates games not only on playability but also on accessibility: conventional classics like *Far Cry* or *Half-Life* have received sign language slagging because of their absence of subtitles.

"Close your eyes and just listen to the sounds. We create audio games with vivid sound imagery"



Half-Life 2: pushing the boundaries in every conceivable way.



Relax To Win: one game that won't get your pulse racing.



Adventuring is the most deaf-accessible genre.

Kevin Bierre, a professor at Rochester Institute of Technology in the United States, is a member of the Game Accessibility Special Interest Group. He says that developers need to be made aware of their audience's needs. "For example, games with cut-scenes are not really accessible to the deaf unless there is a text captioning feature. Some games already do this, but coverage is rather spotty."

While most developers continue to potter away with only their mainstream devotees in mind, a few have catered for special needs. *Alpha Centauri: Alien Crossfire*, *Rise Of Nations*, *Railroad Tycoon 3* and *Civilisation III* have patches

that optimise the games for colour blindness. *Medal Of Honor* and *Call Of Duty* have brought subtitled to the fore, and *Half-Life 2* promises to break the mould further with a fully integrated system for deaf gamers, subtitled sound effects as well as dialogue.

SILENCE IS GORDON

According to Marc Laidlaw, writer at Valve, as soon as *Half-Life* was shipped the developers "received letters from deaf gamers asking about subtitles. We provided copies of the original *Half-Life* script to anyone who asked, but also made plans to design a good subtitle and closed caption system for *HL2*."

"Audio feedback is a critical element of gameplay that most gamers take for granted," he adds. "We wanted to be able to offer the same level of feedback to deaf gamers, to let them know that an unseen enemy is calling for backup, or that a chopper is winding up to fire a burst of ammo." Gerald Stopher, a deaf gamer from Kent is delighted by the news: "If the game has 100 per cent full subtitles, then we have nothing to complain about."

Catering for visually impaired and blind gamers is a tougher challenge, but one that hasn't unnerved adventurous developers. Justin Daubemire, who lost his eyesight at 17, runs a studio alongside an equally sightless team of programmers,



Everyone knows when they've bagged a hoodlum in *XIII*.



Age of Mythology is a game of heroes and monsters, mighty armies and epic deeds. Lead your culture through the Ages...

Strategy is another deaf-friendly genre.

sound engineers, content writers and beta testers. Understandably, BSC Games has binned graphics altogether.

EYES WIDE SHUT

"Not only does this cut back substantially on development costs, but it forces us to be more creative with audio imagery."

says Daubenmire. "In other words, we only have sound to paint all the scenes in the mind of the gamer. Next time you are playing a game, close your eyes and just listen to the sounds. We create audio games with vivid sound imagery."

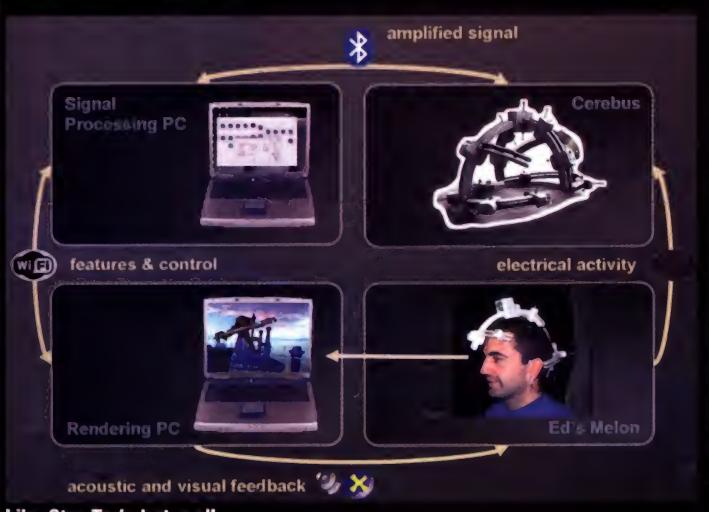
Currently, Daubenmire's team is developing CastleQuest, a MMOG, and a

MIND GAMES

PLAYING MIND BALANCE WITH ELECTRODES ATTACHED TO YOUR HEAD IS AS SPOOKILY DR SPOCK AS IT SOUNDS

What's the science? "We all have millions of thought processes, but there are also deeper, almost resonant waves," explains Media Lab's Gary McDarby.

"At present, *Mind Balance* is able to separate two thought processes: left and right. That might sound basic, but remember that telecommunication started with Morse Code, a dot and a dash."



Like Star Trek, but real!

SUSPECT DEVICE

EQUAL ACCESS PERIPHERALS ARE GODSENDS FOR DISABLED PC GAMERS

THE CLAW

Although it sounds like a superhero's nemesis, the Claw is ideal for gamers with impaired co-ordination. This hand-shaped device allows you to remap keyboard commands, co-ordinating them with buttons at the end of its fingers.

GAME COMMANDER

Bin your keyboard. Here's a voice recognition engine which lets you bark button orders at compatible games like a demented telesales rep.



WINDOW-EYES

This screen window converts Windows text into speech. Perfect for both the blind and the illiterate, then.

HEADMASTER

No, it's not a cane-wielding school tyrant. This device offers a completely hands-free operation of the computer: you control the mouse by head movements.



Monkey Island: fun for everyone.

fully interfaced game engine, Symphony. In the engine's first interactive jaunt, *Mind Balance*, you control a tightrope walker's progress through the power of thought alone. Holy cow!

Another Symphony game, *Relax To Win*, monitors skin response, giving electrical indicators as to how relaxed you are. Whether you have cerebral palsy, motor neuron disease, or a terminal case of couch potato-it's, anyone can play this game. The implications, not only for disabled people's daily interaction with technology, but also for the game industry at large, are huge.

"Take the FPS genre," says Media Lab's Gary McDarby. "It's hard to see the next quantum leap in those games. Yes graphics, AI, physics are all getting better. Yes, the genre's multiplayer aspects are getting better. But at the end of the day it's still *Wolfenstein 3D* with added gloss. I can give you a quantum leap. How about you add genuine, real biometrics?"

With access all areas, a gamer's life can only become more enjoyable. Deaf, blind, disabled and able-bodied alike, everyone deserves a stab at PC games. That's a commandment even Moses, busily whupping online whippersnappers in *Ghost Recon*, can hear loud and clear. The age of fully inclusive gaming is about to begin. **PCZ**

new first-person shooter game called *The Void*. Based in a spaceport that's been overtaken by a nasty race of extraterrestrials, this is *Aliens* with the lights out. Imagine crawling through a passageway in pitch black with a slobbering beast nibbling your heels, the ping of your radar alerting you to its unseen presence.

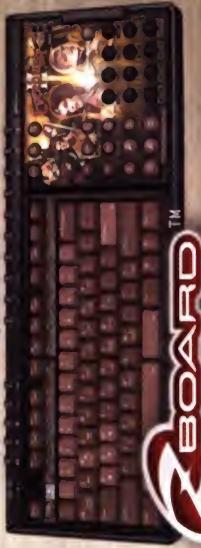
There soon will come a time when everyone is invited to the party. Media Lab Europe, a non-profit research group based in Dublin, is creating game technology that offers complete accessibility. Amidst a multi-disciplinary team of scientists, techno-boffins, and game industry veterans, Media Lab has a





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EMULATION ZONE

BREAKING NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF EMULATION, WITH RETRO REANIMATOR STUART CAMPBELL

OH BOY...

NINTENDO'S Virtual Boy, a pseudo-handheld, pseudo-3D game console released in 1995, was the company's biggest ever flop. Under-supplied with games, prone to causing headaches in players, and awkward to use, it was a disastrous failure, and led to its creator, the legendary Gunpei Yokoi (now sadly deceased) leaving the company under a cloud. It does, however, have at least two things going for it. Firstly, it has the most excellent instruction-manual troubleshooting page in the history of mankind (see picture, below right). And secondly, there are a few gems among the handful of software titles released for it.

Of course, there'd be no reason for alert viewers of Emu Zone to give a monkey's nuts about that, were it not for the fact that the PC's first playable Virtual Boy emulator has finally been released. There have been VB emus around for years, but all of them were so unplayably slow as to be useless (also, none of them had any sound and most of them only ran in DOS). With the release of Red Dragon 0.38, however, it's finally possible to enjoy VB games at the speed they were meant to be played, with sound (in some cases, make sure you read the 'warning' boxout) and without having to destroy your spine.

"Prone to causing headaches and awkward to use, it was a disaster"

WARNING!

Red Dragon did terrible things to Emu Zone's soundcard, rendering it mute for all purposes except the playing of Virtual Boy games. Only a system restore managed to get it working again, so be sure to set a restore point before you run the emu, just in case. Or check the homepage for a bugfixed version.

WHAT IS EMULATION?



By installing an emulator, you can run games that were programmed for different platforms – such as coin-ops – in their original form. The games come in the form of a ROM (Read Only Memory) that you load into the emulator to run. There are legal issues though, and unless you own the original game, it's often against the law to download a ROM. For that reason, we can't give you links to ROMs, though we can give you links to the emulators themselves.

and eyesight by hunching up and gazing into a tiny little screen set inside a giant pair of binoculars on a tripod.

Get it working and you'll be rewarded with the likes of VB *Wario Land*, a classic Nintendo platformer very much like the Game Boy's hugely successful *Wario* titles, but with a new 3D element (Wario can leap "into" the screen to walk on platforms in the distance) that adds an enormous feeling of depth and believability to the environment. Or there's *Mario Clash* – an intriguing meld of the original *Mario Bros* game and Frisbee-flinging coin-op *Discs Of Tron* – not to mention action-packed shooter *Vertical Force*.

Red Dragon is a bit of a pain in the arse to use – the VB had a hideously complicated joypad, and while you can redefine the emulator's awkward keyset, it doesn't save it, so you have to do it every time you load the emu. The video drivers are somewhat temperamental too. But all that said, this is a pioneering release of one of the most technically-demanding consoles to emulate ever, and with a little persistence you'll get it running sweetly. It's certainly fascinating enough to be worth the effort. □

LINKS

www.vr32.de – Red Dragon distribution page

EMULATION OF THE MONTH

OVER THE RAINBOW: *DONKEY KONG DX* (COIN-OP)

Recently in Emu Zone we've been noting the long-overdue resurrection of some splendid old DOS-only emulation, but none of it has been so warmly received by your humble reporter than the return of EmuDX. Alert viewers will recall our first brush with this enhanced arcade emulator back in issue 119, which was unfortunately somewhat ruined by PCZ's then-Art Editor cropping all the enhanced bits off the pictures. Hopefully this time you'll actually be able to see the beautiful backgrounds which have been added to DK's levels, though sadly you still won't be able to hear the lovely new music and sound effects, or appreciate the translucent flickering of the fireballs.

This resurrection (and that of *Pac-Man*, *Frogger* and the other games supported by EmuDX's enhancements) has come about thanks to the incorporation of the EmuDX code into RAIN, a longstanding arcade emu which has lived in the shadow of MAME for several years (since these days it no longer runs any games that MAME doesn't), but which now has a bona fide reason to exist again. So in fact, that's two resurrections in one. Never say you don't get value for money from Emu Zone.

LINKS

www.rainemu.com – RAIN homepage
www.arcadeathome.com/emu_dx.php – Enhancement files for the EmuDX games



EMU ARCHIVE AT
WWW.EXCELLENTCONTENT.COM/EMUZONE



It looks a lot better in motion, trust us.



Perhaps blind people should try that too.

Problem:
 There is an image on the screen, but the image is not clear or not in 3-D.

Solution:

- Make sure your face is firmly pressed against the eyeshade and that you have both eyes open.



See? It is enhanced, really.



Attila Anga (Angus)
Creative designer on *Nexus: The Jupiter Incident* at Mithis

DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

What PC games are you playing at the moment?

There are two games which are always on my hard drive (other than *Nexus*, of course). The first is *Counter-Strike*, and the other is *Star Wars Galaxies*. I've been playing it constantly for almost a year.

What is your favourite game of all time?

I have several favourites. First off is *Betrayal At Krondor* – an RPG with outstanding storytelling, interesting characters and a great combat system. Also *Civilization*, *System Shock*, *Tron 2.0*, *Half-Life* and *Counter-Strike*.

What are you most proud of in your career?

My work on *Nexus: The Jupiter Incident*. It's the first game I've worked on, so I've learned a lot. It was a real learn-as-you-go affair. I feel we've created something good and I'm proud of it.

What has the PC contributed most to videogaming?

PCs are continually developing at a very impressive speed. You know the feeling – you buy some top-notch hardware and it becomes near-junk in a couple of months. This rapid hardware improvement makes it possible for games to become more and more sophisticated.

What is your company's philosophy?

Mithis today is the biggest Hungarian developer studio. Our goal is to develop outstanding quality games, on consoles and PC. We make the kind of games that we expect will get a good reception from players – we believe in quality over quantity.

What's the best thing about your job?

I love to see my ideas and designs appear in the game. When I design a mission, the level designers create it, and I can finally play with it.

What's the worst thing about your job?

I hate when the things I've made go wrong, especially when it happens because someone else did their job badly. There is nothing worse than salvaging the ruins in an attempt to repair the damage.

What are you working on at the moment?

I'm still working on *Nexus: The Jupiter Incident*. We're currently finalising the localisation and killing the last bugs.

What's the Next Big Thing in PC gaming?

As hardware gets better, more and more barriers will fall down. We'll walk in life-like 3D environments and we'll fly in space fighters with hundreds of other stunningly presented ships. These things won't exactly be new, but what they will be is better.

BAN THESE SICK GAMES!

WHEN IT COMES TO SURVIVOR, WE'RE WITH THE DAILY MAIL



HEROES OF GROUND ZERO



Justifiable game? Or rubber-necking ghoul-sim? You decide.



IN THE EYE OF ANDREW



"We can't think of a more inappropriate game to develop when gamers are being portrayed as heartless automatons"

atmosphere of depressing reality', along with cinematic effects of fire, smoke, storms and explosions that'll 'strongly appeal to the player's voyeurism' – which to us sounds like rubber-necking at its worse. We know that we experience virtual battlefields in *Call Of Duty* and *Conflict* games every other day – but there's a chasm of taste between that and fighting for survival with innocent bystanders whose family's grief is still raw. Most games revolve around death in some way, but we can't think of a more inappropriate game to develop in a time when gamers

are being portrayed as heartless, violence-obsessed automatons.

Should it ever see the light of day you'll be able to save those around you, but you'll also be able to become a maniac, loot everything and give in to absolute anarchy. Does killing other people to ensure your own survival as a hurricane approaches constitute fun? We hope that we won't have to find out. Let the debate begin.



What do you think about the issues raised here? Good or bad, we want to know. Write to PC ZONE at the usual address or email: mailbox@pczone.co.uk

Twist In The Tale

THE CREATION OF TELLTALE GAMES SUGGESTS THAT SAM AND MAX MAY HAVE SURVIVED

EVERYONE remembers what they were doing on March 4 2004 – the day that *Sam & Max* dream tragically died before its time. We were at work when we heard the news; everything that happened afterwards is just a blur of tears and unparalleled anger.

Thankfully though, there's a light at the end of the tunnel. A bunch of hacked-off developers, spurred on by the community outcry that arose from the gaming populace, have gone on to create their own company – Telltale Games. They're also promising that their first game is due to be a continuation of a well-loved licence – and even though they're keeping shtum on exactly what it is, we're strongly lead to believe that it's a dog and rabbit-thing adventure.

"Many people are passionate about adventure games," explains Dan Connors, the CEO of the operation that unites

talents from multiple Lucas adventure classics, including the superb *Grim Fandango*. "Adventure games have the potential to reach much wider demographics. Using the adventure game point-and-click mechanic to tell stories and present characters, as a way to make popular mass licences interactive, makes sense. People are starting to catch on with games like *Sherlock Holmes* and *CSI* – we're going to focus our energy into figuring out why so many people love adventure games, yet so few are being made."

So is it really *Sam & Max* that they're working on? We'll have to wait and see. You would think that the gruesome twosome would remain Lucas Intellectual Property, but stranger things have happened – and there are few 'well-loved' licenses' that could be revived from anywhere but the Lucas stable. Sam and Max are dead. So long live Sam and Max?



Could these carefree days live again?



Telltale reunites *Grim Fandango* staff.

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Indie Zone

DRAGGING THE WORLD OF UNDERGROUND DEVELOPERS KICKING AND SCREAMING INTO THE LIMELIGHT

OCCASIONALLY, Indie Zone wonders if anyone actually reads this page. This is partly due to our own paranoia (ahem), and partly due to the fact that the games we feature here aren't your typical PC fare. For example, this month we've got a game about a hamster rolling down slopes, and one about jumping

on arrows in time to music. Neither feature realistic rallying-simulation elements, foot-thick flight manuals or any wartime scenarios. Do you care? Or have you skipped forward to news of the latest mods to make all the walls in *Doom 3* day-glo pink so you can see where the bloody hell you're going? Hello?

FREE PLAY STEPMANIA

(Stepmania)

www.stepmania.com/stepmania/

KONAMI'S ARCADE dancing game *Dance Dance Revolution* (known as the less catchy *Dancing Stage* over here) has been one of the company's greatest money-spinners, largely due to the fact that each iteration of the series features only a couple of dozen songs, and only a handful that you've heard of (the rest are in-house Japanese Eurodisco soundalikes). Because of this, Konami can keep releasing pretty much the same game over and over, in a manner that makes EA Sports look like a model of artistic restraint. Alas, this also leaves dance-loving gamers frustrated and needing to load many versions of the game to get all the songs they like in one go.

Thank goodness, then, for *StepMania*. A stupendous collaborative work, *StepMania* is a PC remake of *DDR* that implements every feature of every incarnation of the real thing. What's more, it's produced in an open format enabling anyone to create 'step files' (the sequence of arrows you have to dance to in time to the music) from any piece of music you feel like. Every track from every version of *DDR* has been converted, along with countless hundreds of other songs, and you can also compile playlists made up of your own personal favourites. Contributors have also created background pictures, commentator files and every possible other addition necessary to make precisely the *DDR* game you always wanted.

And if you can't bring yourself to entertain the idea of leaping around on a plastic mat in front of your PC, *StepMania* played with the cursor keys is a brilliant old-school arcade-type reaction and co-ordination game. You don't need to dance to enjoy it.



Rollin', rollin', rollin'...

HAMSTERBALL

£7.14 | Pub: Raptisoft | Dev: Raptisoft | www.raptisoft.com/hamsterball.shtml

Stuart Campbell, lover of both small rodents and retro gaming, finally finds his niche in life

ON THE CD **ON THE DVD** **MARBLE MADNESS.** Let's get it out of the way early, shall we?

Hamsterball is an unofficial remake/sequel to Atari's 1984 coin-op, copying the 'roll a ball down a chequered 3D pyramid thing' exactly, but replacing all the level designs with new ones. You get 12 geometric mountainsides to traverse here rather than the original five, you're a hamster in one of those perspex exercise balls rather than a marble, and there are a couple of new features (such as the Escher-esque 'Odd Race' where the perspective changes from one floor tile to the next, and the circular saws which suddenly slice half the floor away from under you). Aside from that though, this is *Marble Madness 2004*.

It's a beautifully-executed job too – gorgeous to look at and fiendishly designed. Almost too fiendishly in fact, as it gets quite staggeringly difficult by around the halfway mark, and Indie Zone suspects that you may simply never see the last few tracks, which seems a terrible shame given the effort that's clearly gone into designing them.

Even in the game's 'Pipsqueak' mode, which boosts your time limit and does away with all the moving enemies (great fun for young kids too), time gets absurdly tight later on, and the mode doesn't unlock the various courses for time-trial races anyway. Turn the enemies back on and a few of them (including the aforementioned saws, and the seemingly arbitrary and unavoidable giant mallet) seem a tad unfair too, which is a bad flaw in a game where every second counts. On the upside, there are multiplayer battle modes to discover, though to make the most of them you need a full complement of control devices – mouse, joypads and (for one unlucky sap who might as well just give up at the start), a keyboard.

Hamsterball is so loveable, though, that most of these faults can be forgiven. If you're up to the challenge, this is a fantastic game at a bargain price. Once again though, Indie Zone has to deduct 20 per cent. Why, we hear you cry? For the shameful way the developer has failed to even passingly acknowledge or credit the original game it's copied. Tsk.

PCZONE VERDICT **66**

Did anyone say 'hamsterrific'?

IN YOUR HEAD

GRIM FANDANGO LEGEND TIM SCHAFER RETURNS WITH A PLATFORM ODDITY CERTAIN TO TURN HEADS. AND PROBABLY INVADE THEM



From the brains behind *Full Throttle*...



Insanity has never been so much fun.

ON THE DVD
WE'VE LEARNED TO expect odd things from Tim Schafer, the mind behind many, many great examples of gaming imagination – all the way from *Maniac Mansion* and *Day Of The Tentacle* to the sublime *Grim Fandango*. This time, however, he and his happy band of LucasArts refugees at Double Fine have come up with something that ups the oddball ante even further.

Dubbed *Psychonauts*, it's a platform game about a group of peacekeepers who use their telepathic powers for the promotion of truth and justice. Sadly, their young protégés are being abducted by a deranged scientist who wants to steal their brains, and it's down

to one plucky student, Raz, to run in third-person fashion through three real-world levels and ten set within the minds of madmen, creatures and angry loners. Still with us? While Raz is messing about inside people's heads it'll be his duty to sort out their emotional baggage (represented as piles of weeping suitcases) and generally fix their messed up heads with his psychic powers of Telekinesis, Invisibility, Clairvoyance and fire-starting Pyrokinesis. With some intriguing *Zelda*-esque platforming (made even more bizarre by Raz's habit of grabbing his thought bubbles and using them as a shield or a skateboard) *Psychonauts* was originally an Xbox exclusive, although a round of publisher tennis has now meant that we're in the firing line as well. Check out the movie on our DVD and bask in the oddness.

■ Publisher: Majesco (US)
■ Developer: Double Fine
■ ETA: Q1 2005
■ Website: www.psychonauts.com



If *Tron* were made by Disney... oh, hang on.

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RUNNERS-UP PRIZES

- Five lucky runners-up will get a copy of Men of Valor to enjoy on their PC

Fed up being chained to your desk(top)? Ever felt like gaming on the go? Win our fabulous competition and you can get your hands on the finest gaming laptop money can buy...

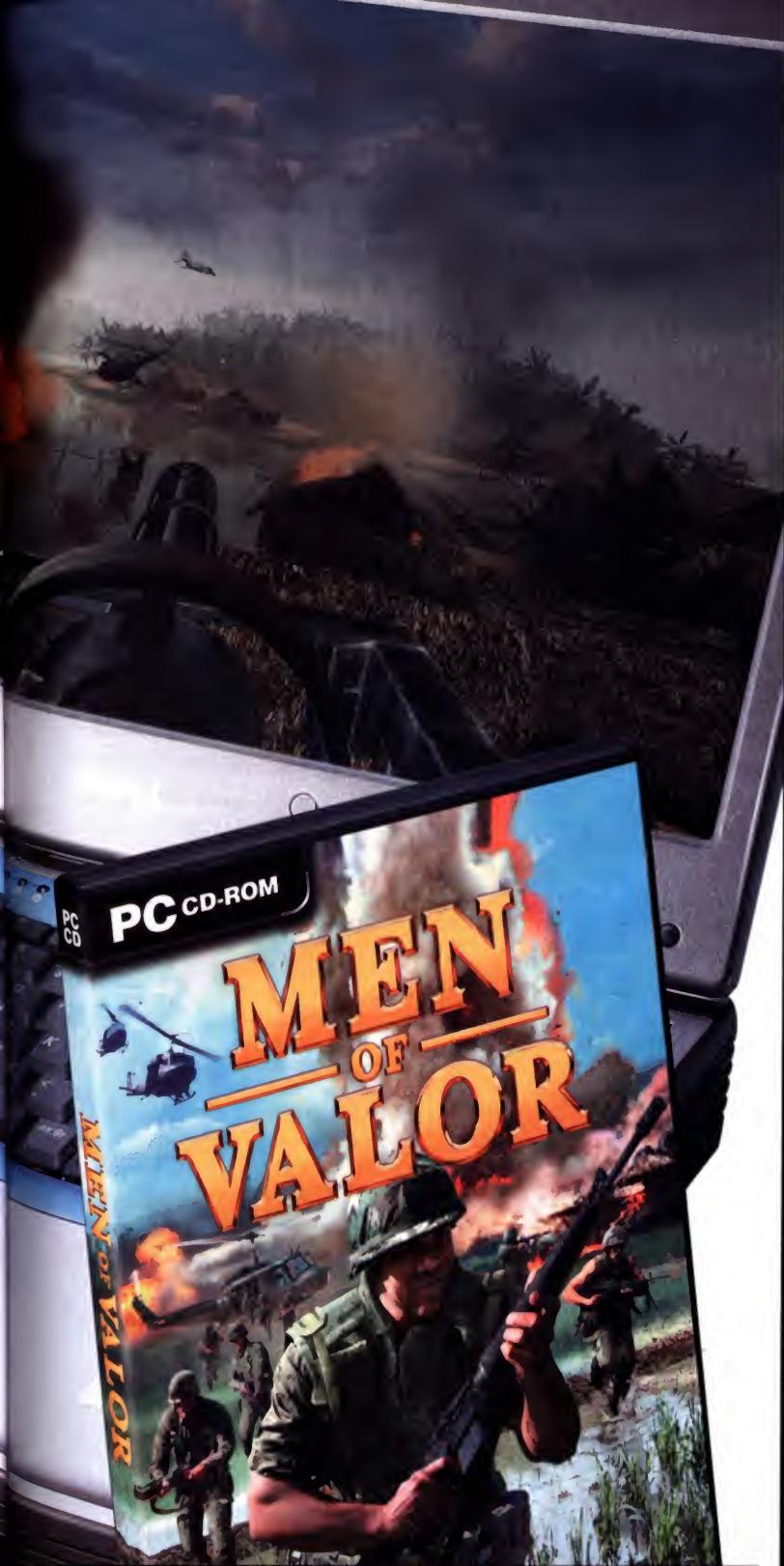
WE'VE ALL BEEN THERE. Halfway through the most exciting level of the latest in gaming action, stuck between save points and running low on ammo, when a call from your significant other in the living room informs you that the latest episode of the popular award-winning sitcom, *Whoops Vicar, There Go My Trousers!* is

just starting. Aaargh! Do you forsake your hard-won progress or miss the latest in water-cooler comedy and risk alienation from your office colleagues the next morning?

Well, now you can relax – salvation is at hand. We've teamed up with VU Games to celebrate the release of Vietnam shooter *Men Of Valor*, and together we're offering a prize that'll free you up to take your gaming on the move and let you watch the telly with one eye, while killing pixelated bad guys with the other.

■ The lucky/skilful/most handsome (delete as applicable) winner will get their hands on a Dell Inspiron 9100 laptop (reviewed in issue 143, score 90%). Boasting a Pentium 4 3.4GHz processor, a 128MB Mobility Radeon 9700 graphics card, 512MB of RAM, a 60GB hard drive and even an integrated subwoofer, the Inspiron 9100 is surely the ultimate gaming laptop. The winner – along with five lucky runners-up – will also receive a copy of *Men Of Valor*, the forthcoming 'Nam-based action shooter from the team that brought you *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*. *Men Of Valor* will take you through the tensions, risks and horrors of jungle warfare, from missions around the Danang airbase to the infamous Tet Offensive and beyond.

To be in with a chance of nabbing the grand prize, simply answer the question opposite and post your entry to the address listed no later than Wednesday December 8, 2004. For the full terms and conditions, see page 7.



Q. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING TELEVISION CRIME-FIGHTING TEAMS RECEIVED THEIR TRAINING IN VIETNAM?

a) Charlie's Angels b) The A-Team c) Bodie & Doyle

Write your answer (a, b or c) on a postcard with your name, address and contact phone number and send it to:

Men of Valor Competition, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP. Closing date is Wednesday December 8, 2004.

You can also enter by text. Simply send **PCZValor** to **83125**, with your answer (a, b or c), plus your full name and address.

Messages will cost 50p plus your standard operator text messaging charge. For full terms and conditions, see page 7.

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THE MAN WHO KNOWS

GRAND Theft Auto drove a teenager to plan a re-enactment of the **Columbine Massacre**, claims Florida-based lawyer **Jack Thompson**. **Tobin Kerns**, 16, of **Massachusetts**, as popularised by the **Bee Gees** song of the same name, was arrested after police discovered that he planned to mark next April's anniversary of the 1999 tragedy by killing students and teachers at his school. Thompson claims that detectives on the case told him that **GTA** was one of the boy's "favourite games", thus leading the self-appointed videogame violence expert to conclude that it was used to prepare for the **copycat carnage**. Thompson **incorrectly** brayed: "The technique of **killing civilians** and then first-responders when they get there is the primary scenario to win in all the **GTA** games." He also described the **GTA** titles as "killing simulators actually used by gangs". His litany of **outrageous theories** has targeted **GTA** before, but he also professed that the **Beltway Sniper**, **John Allen Muhammad** trained using science-fiction shooter **Halo**, despite more moderate pundits citing the US Army veteran's expert qualification in rifle use. Most recently, Thompson predictably threatened to sue Rockstar over the tabloid-fuelled **Manhunt** case. An expert said: "It's time that this grossly out-of-touch self-serving rent-a-quote fantasist wound his neck in."

In other news, **Leisure Suit Larry** has been banned in **Australia**. Despite the country's lengthy heritage of harbouring criminals, the **foul-mouthed sex pest** has been told to **rack off** by Oz officials. A devastated Larry said: "It's a bit rich coming from a country where all the girls love it up the dirt-box." **He** said it, not us.

Finally, legendary **ZONE** writer **Charlie Brooker** has angered the **entirety of the USA** by ironically suggesting that reigning world liability **George Dubya Bush** should be assassinated. In his weekly column in **leftie cognoscenti thinktank The Guardian**, he finished off with a clear and chilling message to the president to **watch his back**, asking: "John Wilkes Booth, Lee Harvey Oswald, John Hinckley Jr - where are you now that we need you?" Despite Brooker's claims that this was **irony**, his comments garnered outrage on **Fox News** and numerous **right-wing** websites. A **ZONE** insider was heard to **whisper**: "Nice one."

"It's time this grossly out-of-touch self-serving rent-a-quote wound his neck in"

ROUND-UP

HERDING FASCINATING NUGGETS OF GAMING INFORMATION INTO AN EASILY DIGESTIBLE PEN



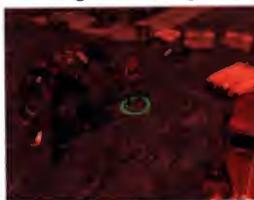
STILL RIPPING NEW ONES

Duke Nukem Forever news? Well... Yes actually. It's been revealed that George Broussard's team at 3D Realms has signed up to use the highly impressive Meqon physics engine - fun demos of which can be found on this month's cover discs and at www.meqon.com. **DNF** tales aren't normally newsworthy, but it's the first official announcement we've heard from the grizzled one in quite a while, and the Meqon jeep demo is pretty crazy.



MUTANTS RISING

You wait six years for a post-apocalyptic RPG and then two turn up at once. Troika, the studio whose team has a multitude of original **Fallout** developers, may have lost the official licence for **Fallout 3** to Bethesda, but it's still working on an irradiated wasteland RPG. It's untitled as yet, but the 3D engine is looking snazzy - and its traditional leanings (despite real-time combat) should provide a nice counterpoint to whatever Bethesda comes up with.



BIG MONKEY

Peter Jackson and his cohorts at Wingnut Films are in the process of making a new **King Kong** film aimed for next Christmas (though rumours persist that he's making **The Hobbit**). In any case, Ubisoft's Montreal and Montpellier studios (the latter responsible for **Beyond Good & Evil**) have been tasked with developing the film tie-in. The film's set to be a powerful retelling of the big chimp's demise (starring Jack Black and Naomi Watts) - so who knows what the game's going to be like...



GOD BLESS

John Kerry, who by the time you read this may well be in control of the good ol' US of A, is the star of a game level that details all the Silver Star-winning Vietnam bravery he's been banging on about. **KumaWar** (the rubbish downloadable squad shooter) has content derived from Kerry's fabled swift-boat mission in the Mekong Delta. Straight from navy records, you can check it out at www.kumawar.com.



RHYTHM OF THE TRIBAL DANCE

WIN COPIES OF TRIBES: VENGEANCE

Tribes: Vengeance - a game with heart, soul, guns and great big hills to slide down. It's a shooter with a decent story, the best princesses since Peach and a multiplayer contingent that's as smooth as a lake of Actimel bacterial yoghurt drink. We love it, reviewers around the world have agreed and a few die-hard multiplayer **Tribes** fans have moaned a bit - the more things change, the more they stay the same.

Anyway, we've got ten copies to give away to the worthy. To stake your claim, simply send an answer to the following question by mail or text message.

WIN BY TXT!

Alternatively, to enter the competition by text, send PCZTRIBES to 83125, with your answer (a, b or c), plus your full name and address.

Closing date: Dec 8, 2004. Messages cost 50p plus your standard operator text messaging charge. For full terms and conditions see p7.

Which band famously sang about **Two Tribes**?

- Frankie Goes To Hollywood
- Gary Goes To Santa Monica
- Jeff Goes To Grimsby

Send mail entries to: **Tribes** compo, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP.



Well, it's no **Jet Set Willy**...



GREAT EXPECTATIONS

COLIN FARRELL AND OLIVER STONE'S *ALEXANDER* BIOPIC GETS AN RTS MAKEOVER

ALEXANDER the Great, the man who'd conquered 90 per cent of the known world by his 25th birthday, is about to get his achievements charted in RTS form. The game is attached to the Oliver Stone epic, *Alexander*, starring Colin Farrell, Angelina Jolie and Anthony Hopkins.

With extracts and music from the movie, *Alexander* is set to be a game that tries to balance itself between newbies and *Total War* nuts – but if it outscals Creative Assembly's masterpiece, we'll eat our collective mousemats. Then again, the historic campaigns promised by the game, coupled with all the resource management that these screenshots suggest are bound

to attract gamers of a certain ilk. And the presence of Colin Farrell may well attract gamers of a certain ilk as well.

It's odd to come across a film licence that isn't a crap platformer or a roaming beat 'em up (hell, they're the only things keeping those genres up), so we're quite interested in how *Alexander* fares. But in the face of *Rome: Total War* and *The Battle For Middle-Earth*, it's got some fairly hefty competition.



Oliver Stone probably won't be able to crowbar a conspiracy theory in here...

- Publisher: Ubisoft
- Developer: Ubisoft
- ETA: November
- Website: www.alexanderthemovie.com



We preferred him in *Ballykissangel*.



Alexander's empire was epic in every way possible.

I BELIEVE
I CAN
FLY

SOON

WWW.CITYOFHEROES.COM

Search For A Game

Got the greatest game idea since *Pong*? Come and put it to the ultimate test - PC ZONE's Search For A Game...



It's everybody's favourite time of the month again! Yes, Search For A Game enters its ninth successful month. We've had winners, we've had losers, we've had sinners and we've had boozers. But more than that, we've had game ideas. Tons of them. This month it's the turn of **Mike Agar** of **Cockerton** in **Darlington** to walk the walk, talk the talk and, apparently, stalk the stalk. Not sure how this one's going to go down, but see for yourself as we look at...

"Grand Theft Auto with a zoom lens"

PAPARAZZI

PAPARAZZI sees you as a freelance photo journalist in a GTA-style free-roaming world. Starting off with basic camera and transport, you choose which jobs you want to accept. You're only offered mediocre jobs at first (fires, accidents, etc), and these kind of events will be generated randomly. So if you happen across one, you can get bonus cash for taking pictures on spec.

Also, there will be random encounters with people of interest. Catch them at their worst, such as falling over

drunk or with someone they shouldn't be with and you get even more rewards.

As your reputation grows, so will the work offered to you. Choose a path to take between serious photo-journalism or tabloid hackery, or mix it up. As your rep grows, you'll get offered the chance to infiltrate installations to gather evidence of cover-ups, or, using stealth gameplay, crash a major celebrity party avoiding security to snap the guests. Each mission will have

numerous ways to succeed including disguises (think *Hitman*) and locations to take your pictures from. Taking a picture would be as hard as taking a sniper shot.

As you make money, you can upgrade your equipment so you have zoom lenses, laser mics and helicopters. If you're spotted by security, a mad pursuit will ensue. If you get caught, you'll receive a kicking or a restraining order, your equipment confiscated. Get back to base safely however, and you can sell to the highest bidder.



Snapping photos, not necks, is the key. Clarity and focus would play a part.



Republic featured the occasional paparazzi - would Mike's game look like this?



Sun, sea, celebs and photography. But no guns. Could it work?

WHAT THE JUDGES SAY



Well Mike, it's funny that you mention GTA in relation to your idea, because there's an excellent mission in Vice City where you have to take snaps of the mayor with a porn star. Unfortunately, I don't reckon you could stretch *Paparazzi* to a full game, as the idea of being a photographer is infinitely more boring than being a gangster or psychopath. Maybe it'd be better as something closer to *Manhunt* or the movie *Se7en*, making the game much darker in content, with the photos you take jam-packed with gratuitous sex and violence. I'd definitely play that. **Verdict: MISS!**



I like it, I like it a lot. Done well, *Paparazzi* could offer a great mixture of unconventional stealth, sleazy intrigue and humour, with plenty of frantic chases (by foot, car, helicopter) as you tracked your prey. Picking up tips on the whereabouts of celebs could add a level of puzzle-solving, while competition with rival paps would provide plenty of gameplay incentive. Certainly you're limited by the lack of guns 'n' violence, but I think a clever developer could overcome this. There's also a level of voyeurism you could tap in to if you chose to. Overall, a lot of potential. **Verdict: HIT!**



I think that this would work brilliantly as a subsidiary part of a larger game - as it already has done in the brutally under-selling masterpiece that was *Beyond Good & Evil*. As a single game, only the greatest of great developers would be able to stop it from getting boring. Also, you have to remember that any publisher anywhere in the entire world would undoubtedly have turned the telephoto lens into a sniper rifle by the time the game went gold. As a GTA side-plot this would really work, as a solitary game it probably wouldn't. **Verdict: MISS!**



"Ooh, that was close. Thought it sounded like ideal Molyneux material myself. Never mind, good try. Keep sending your ideas in, we're nearing the grand final. See you all next month!"

Send your ideas, in no more than 300 words (along with a one-line pitch and any artwork) to 'Search For A Game' at the usual address.

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MEET THEM AND BEAT THEM

CHARTS

In association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

Near, far, wherever you are - I believe that the chart does go on. Once, more, you open the door, and you're here in my chart, and my chart will go on... And on

ChartTrack

TOP 10


 Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association


The more things change, the more they stay the same. *The Sims* has left the building, only for *The Sims 2* to top the charts in its place. Right now we're happy - it's not a bad little game after all. This time next year we're thinking that we'll be pissed off.



Whoever thought that protecting Alpine regions against elephant attacks would be so much fun? Well, everyone really. *Rome: Total War* was always going to blow our minds - plus, there are War Dogs. Did we mention that there are War Dogs?



We reckon that *Battlefront* is far inferior to the majority of PC online shooters, but it's still pretty thrilling to traverse the battle of Endor in an AT-ST, blast Stormtroopers in Cloud City or kill Gungans. Our dreams are answered, but not quite completely.

	TITLE	PUBLISHER	SCORE
1	NEW THE SIMS 2	EA	82%
2	NEW ROME: TOTAL WAR	ACTIVISION	93%
3	NEW WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR	THQ	81%
4	NEW CALL OF DUTY: UNITED OFFENSIVE	ACTIVISION	87%
5	NEW STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT	ACTIVISION	78%
6	NEW FIFA FOOTBALL 2005	EA	60%
7	▼ DOOM 3	ACTIVISION	90%
8	▼ CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: SEASON 03/04	EIDOS	90%
9	NEW MYST IV: REVELATION	UBISOFT	85%
10	NEW TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2005	EA	82%

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

It seems that only *Half-Life 2* has a half-chance of persuading the Sims to release their sticky grip.

rjcanty

The Sims 2, bringing untold woe to housewives without powerful enough computers since 2004.

Moomoocow8

I heard that *The Sims 2* promotes and funds terrorism, drug abuse and copyright piracy. I might be wrong, but you can never be too careful.

Reverend Joseph

In the dim and distant past, plebs bought *FIFA* over *Actua Soccer*. Now they continue their wretched buying habits, ploughing more money into the dark one and ignoring the unmatched *Pro Evo*. Wake up! An extra year does not a good game make!



megastores

TOP 10

1. ROME: TOTAL WAR	ACTIVISION
2. THE SIMS 2	EA
3. WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR	THQ
4. CALL OF DUTY: UNITED OFFENSIVE	ACTIVISION
5. DOOM 3	ACTIVISION
6. FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR	THQ
7. TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2005	EA
8. MYST IV: REVELATION	UBISOFT
9. SHARK TALE	ACTIVISION
10. CODENAME: PANZERS - PHASE ONE	EA

COMPETITION



megastores

Win £100 of Virgin vouchers!

PC ZONE and Virgin have teamed up to give you the chance to win 100 shiny pounds-worth of goodies from your local Virgin Megastore. All you have to do to enter is answer the following:

QUESTION:

In Latin what does the phrase 'Cave Canem!' mean?

A Beware of the dog! B This vomitarium is dirty! C Let's take over Europe!

Send your answers on a postcard to: PC ZONE Chart Compo Issue 149, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP. Closing date: December 8 2004

- Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).
- Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
- Please indicate whether you are a current subscriber to PC ZONE.

To enter the competition by text: send PCZVIRGIN, to 83125, with your answer (a,b, or c), plus your full name and address.

■ All text entries must be received by December 8. Messages will cost 50p plus your standard operator text messaging charge.

For general competition terms and conditions, turn to page 7.

INCOMING!

PC ZONE'S RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. ALL APPROXIMATE MONTHLY DATES ARE CORRECT AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRESS

NOVEMBER

ARMIES OF EXIGO	EA
ALEXANDER	UBISOFT
AXIS & ALLIES	ATARI
EVERQUEST II	UBISOFT
FLATOUT	EMPIRE
FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005	SEGA
HALF-LIFE 2	VU GAMES
JOINT OPERATIONS: ESCALATION	NOVALOGIC
MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT	EA
NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND 2	EA
NEXUS: THE JUPITER INCIDENT	HD INTERACTIVE
PAINKILLER: BATTLE OUT OF HELL	DREAMCATCHER
PRINCE OF PERSIA: WARRIOR WITHIN	UBISOFT
PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4	KONAMI
ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3	ATARI
SECOND SIGHT	Codemasters
SID MEIER'S PIRATES!	ATARI
VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE - BLOODLINES	ACTIVISION

DECEMBER

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5	EIDOS
THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH	EA

JANUARY

IMPERIAL GLORY	EIDOS
----------------	-------

MARCH

KOTOR II: THE SITH LORDS	ACTIVISION
PARIAH	HIP INTERACTIVE
PLAYBOY: THE MANSION	UBISOFT
SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY	UBISOFT
STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO	ACTIVISION
STOLEN	HIP INTERACTIVE

APRIL

LEGO STAR WARS	EIDOS
STRONGHOLD 2	GLOBAL STAR

Q1 2005

BROTHERS IN ARMS	UBISOFT
COMMANDOS: STRIKE FORCE	EIDOS
COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WAR	CDV
DRAGONSHARD	ATARI
GHOST RECON 2	UBISOFT
GTR	TBA
SETTLERS: HERITAGE OF KINGS	UBISOFT

2005

ACT OF WAR: DIRECT ACTION	ATARI
ADVENT RISING	VU GAMES
BATTLEFIELD 2	EA
BATTLESTATIONS: MIDWAY	SCI
BET ON SOLDIER	DIGITAL JESTERS
BLACK & WHITE 2	EA
DREAMFALL: THE LONGEST JOURNEY	FUNCOM
DUNGEON SIEGE II	MICROSOFT
EMPIRE EARTH 2	VU GAMES
F.E.A.R.	VU GAMES
GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS	ROCKSTAR
KING KONG	UBISOFT
MIDDLE-EARTH ONLINE	VU GAMES
QUAKE IV	ACTIVISION
SWAT 4	VU GAMES
STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL	THQ
STARSHIP TROOPERS	EMPIRE
THE MATRIX ONLINE	SEGA/WB
THE MOVIES	ACTIVISION
THE WITCHER	TBA
WARTIME COMMAND: BATTLE FOR EUROPE 1939-45	Codemasters
WORLD OF WARCRAFT	VU GAMES
YOU ARE EMPTY	1C

MISSING IN ACTION

The war's not over until the last game comes home...

PLAYBOY: THE MANSION

If you were planning sessions of self-abuse this festive season, you'll be distraught to hear that 'Sims With Boobs' (aka *Playboy: The Mansion*) has been taken in for a dash more augmentation. Hold on until next spring if you possibly can.

- Publisher: Ubisoft
- Developer: Cyberlore Studios
- ETA: Q1 2005
- Website: www.playboylethemanor.com



CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5



In a late tackle that could cost Eidos dear, the new *Champ Man* game may skid right into the close of the year and, possibly, into the next. This leaves Sports Interactive's plucky *Football Manager* with a clear run on goal – but will it be a ball in the top corner or Row Z? Check out the ZONE review on page 64.

- Publisher: Eidos
- Developer: Beautiful Game Studios
- ETA: Q4 2004/Q1 2005
- Website: www.championshipmanager.co.uk

KOTOR 2: THE SITH LORDS

We were expecting it to hit around December, but it turns out that the PC version is about three months behind the Xbox. So while our Xbox compadres will be back in a galaxy far, far away this Christmas, we'll be sitting on our hands until March.

- Publisher: Activision
- Developer: Obsidian
- ETA: March 2004
- Website: www.lucasarts.com



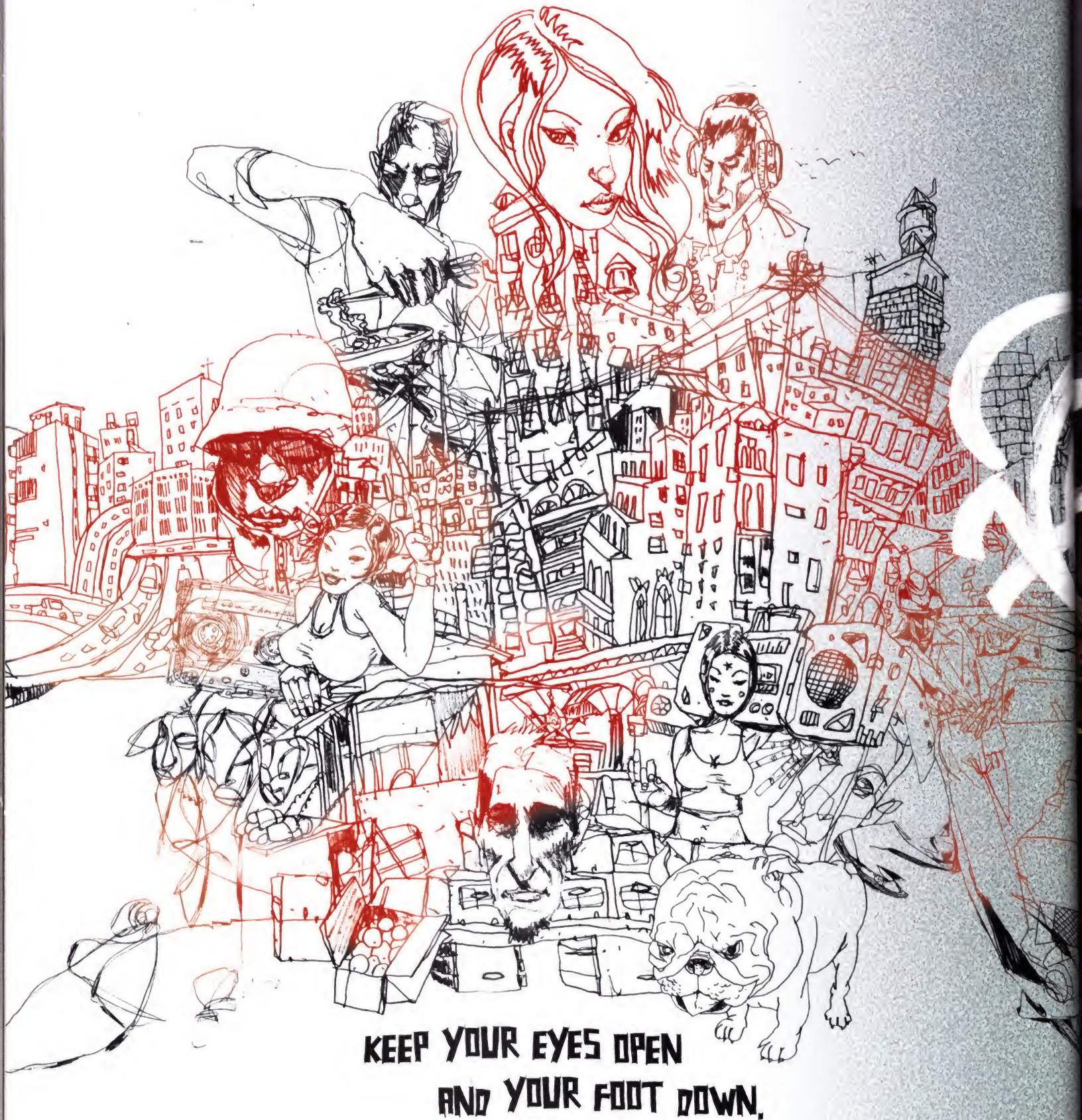
TOP 10 BEST DOGS IN GAMES



1. **SAM**
(GRAVEL-VOICED, NEATLY CLOTHED CHARMER)
2. **DOG**
(HALF-LIFE 2'S AMAZING ROBOT. NOT A REAL DOG)
3. **NAZI DOG**
(ARCHETYPAL EVIL ALSATIAN IN WOLFENSTEIN 3D)
4. **WAR DOG**
(ROME: TOTAL WAR'S MOST CANINE OF UNITS)
5. **WOOF**
(BEYOND GOOD & EVIL'S BUNDLE OF DOGGY LOVE)
6. **DOGMEAT**
(FALLOUT'S HARD-AS-NAILS MUTANT-BITER)
7. **GASPODE**
(ALL-ROUND WONDER-DOG AND RESIDENT OF THE DISCWORLD)
8. **ZOMBIE DOGS**
(RESIDENT EVIL'S OUT-OF-WINDOW-LEAPING SCARY MUTTS)
9. **ANOTHER NAZI DOG**
(ALLIED ASSAULT'S FAST 'N' FEROCIOUS KNEE-CHEWERS)
10. **LARA CROFT**
(NOT A REAL DOG EITHER, BUT A DOG NONETHELESS)



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KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN
AND YOUR FOOT DOWN.



PlayStation.2



INTERNET CONNECTION REQUIRED for online play. PlayStation 2 online play requires Internet Connection, Network Adaptor (for PlayStation 2) and Memory Card (8MB) (for PlayStation 2) (each sold separately). Online play may not be available on all platforms. See online for details.

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Player

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X2: THE RETURN

Egosoft's outer space series boldly goes where no expansion pack has gone before

SPACE blasting/trading game *X2: The Threat* is one of our PC titles of the year, so we've scoured the universe for these sizzling screenshots from the forthcoming add-on pack. "It's always been our goal to redefine the phrase 'freedom of gameplay' and *X2: The Return* makes this style of play even more accessible," says Egosoft's MD, Bernd Lehahn.

X2: The Return picks up only weeks after the end of *X2: The Threat*, with the evil alien race the Khaak continuing their attacks on the X universe. Your character is again Jules Brennan, the son of the *X: Beyond The Frontier* hero, Kyle Brennan. He must learn new skills such as manning turrets to defend convoys, flying escort and attack missions, piloting stealthy spy missions and running a player HQ.

"The strategic HQ is a good example of feedback we received from the *X2* community," adds Lehahn. "It'll be a unique and expandable installation and can be used to control many decisions, from controlling small groups to commanding huge fleets." We'll have an exclusive hands-on of *X2: The Return* next issue.

Publisher: Deep Silver | Developer: Egosoft
ETA: February 2005 | Website: www.x2thethreat.com





THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Starbreeze/
Tigon Studios
PUBLISHER VU Games
WEBSITE www.riddickgame.com/us/
ETA December

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Hybrid FPS, fighter, RPG and stealth game
- Vin Diesel's voice and likeness
- Fantastic graphics and physics engine
- Unique Eye Shine 'see in the dark' ability

CV



STARBREEZE

Starbreeze is a relatively new Swedish developer who merged with O3 Games in 2001. The company's reputation has been enhanced with the success of *Riddick* on Xbox, made with full co-operation of Vin Diesel's own game company Tigon Studios.

2003 *Enclave* was a nice-looking medieval hack 'n' slasher ported from Xbox that we gave 72 per cent back in issue 135. Didn't exactly set the world alight on PC.

2004 Oh dear. After a decent start, Starbreeze delivered another hack 'n' slasher, but *Knights Of The Temple* was distinctly mediocre, with poor attack combos, basic AI and dull environments.

Diesel-power...

THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

Jamie Sefton does porridge in the galaxy's worst prison, to meet the action anti-hero who loves it when the lights are off

BREAKING out of prison is a scenario that's been used in countless movies such as *Escape From Alcatraz* and *The Shawshank Redemption*. Almost by default, it creates dramatic tension, exciting scenarios and memorable characters who have to overcome impossible odds and the threat of death to gain their freedom. Strangely, we always side with the lead character trying to flee, rather than cheering on the guards to give them one more severe beating – which is odd, because in real life, we'd be shunned by society if we drank a toast in our local to a daring jailbreak by dozens of mass murderers.

The latest anti-hero to rattle his cage is Richard B Riddick, the bald, enigmatic hard-as-nails convict from the sci-fi movies *Pitch Black* and *The Chronicles*



Blood on the lens - *Riddick* can be a wonderfully violent game.

Of *Riddick*. *Escape From Butcher Bay* is a videogame prequel, an ultra-violent action-adventure mixing elements of a first-person shooter, stealth game, RPG and brutal beat 'em up. In it, your objective is simple – escape from the galaxy's worst triple-max security prison.

HOORAY FOR HOLLYWOOD

OK, we know what you're thinking – why should we even have a twitch of excitement about a movie tie-in that's been out on Xbox since the summer? Simple – this is a very cool game that you simply cannot ignore. I've already completed the console version, and having now extensively played the enhanced PC 'developer's cut', I can happily confirm that *Escape From Butcher Bay* is shaping up to be the definitive edition of the rip-roaring futuristic blaster. In my opinion, it's also set to be the best movie-to-videogame conversion since *GoldenEye*.

Riddick is without doubt the game's star; a wise-cracking, ice cool psychopath, whose crimes are only ever hinted at, superbly played by the gravel-voiced Vin Diesel, in what's definitely his most convincing acting role yet. After being captured and transported by bounty hunter William J Johns (voiced

"Riddick is the best movie-to-videogame conversion since *GoldenEye*"

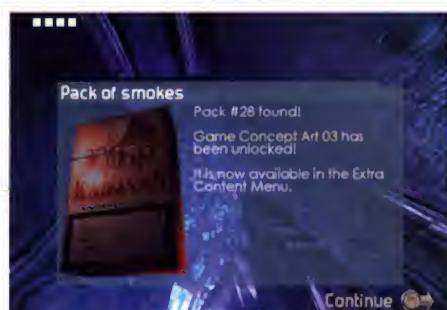
by actor Cole Hauser from *Pitch Black*), you begin your term in *Butcher Bay*. As befits such a place, it's a gritty, rusty, shit-stained hell-hole, populated by disturbed foul-mouthed guards, crazed inmates and other horrors which you encounter as the plot unfolds.

Your first task is just to survive, as your arrival upsets the natural balance of power in the prison yard, throwing a whole gang of murderous individuals in your general direction. Riddick can talk to other characters, using a *Monkey Island*-style text interface to find out essential info about Butcher Bay, such as getting access to weapons. He can also undertake mini-missions, which include everything from retrieving an inmate's missing spectacles to killing a rival gang member.

Escape From Butcher Bay has a very minimalist HUD – weapons are only briefly displayed when chosen, and health, indicated



SMOKING IS GOOD FOR YOU



"Tabs," cough, "can," cough, "be fun!"

RIDDICK'S BAD HABIT IS GREAT FOR COMPLETISTS

Escape From Butcher Bay isn't the longest game ever made – in fact, the approximate length of ten hours is half the content of most PC games nowadays. However, to eke out a bit more gameplay, Starbreeze has included over 50 packs of cigarettes or 'smokes' that unlock character art, movies and other cool easter eggs.

In keeping with the game's dark sense of humour, each pack of smokes is a different brand, such as 'Roulette' (one of these cigarettes will cause instant death); and 'MBryo' (don't smoke while being pregnant).



Vin Diesel plumps for the latest DIY nose-job.



AI guards hunt you in the dark with torches.

by small white boxes in the top left-hand corner of the screen, only appear when you're involved in combat. Your main weapons in the early part of the game are crude handheld affairs, including knuckle-dusters, clubs and shivs. The latter are sharp, improvised pieces of metal or tools that you can use to hit, stab and slice enemies in hugely entertaining first-person punch-ups (see 'Fists of Fury', opposite page).

DEATH ON TWO LEGS

If you prefer, in many situations you can go into a crouching stealth mode, shown when activated by a blue-ish tint to the screen, nice eyeball vein effects and the handy ability to hear any nearby person's heartbeat. Here you can pull off stealth kills by coming out of your hidden position, carefully sneaking up

behind opponents and deftly snapping their necks, slashing their throats or cutting their spinal cords – useful in later levels when the heavily-armed prison guards become your main opponents.

What's more, you can get rid of baddies by dropping on them from above, or use a counter-move that forces guards to comically shoot themselves with their own weapon. However, in the early levels, all guns are DNA-encoded, so Riddick can't pick them up without getting an electric shock. However, you soon work out a way of solving this and get access to shotguns, assault rifles and all manner of juicy heavy weaponry. As in any decent stealth game, dragging and hiding bodies in dark corners then becomes essential if you don't want other guards to discover the nasty mess you've made and call for help.



Don't cross Riddick – he might stab you in the back.

Why Don't You?...



Riddick is a man who doesn't like company.

WITH NO MULTIPLAYER, RIDDICK IS STRICTLY A ONE-MAN SHOW

Gah! If I had a pound for every great PC game that for some reason doesn't have multiplayer, I'd have, well, about 12 pounds. *Escape From Butcher Bay* is perfect for multiplayer – you could have hand-to-hand contests, exclusive co-op missions, deathmatches, CTF with inmates versus guards and other variations using the game's more inhuman opponents. Hopefully, we'll see the mod community get hold of this and do their funky thang, but Starbreeze should be scolded anyway for not providing the 'developer's cut' with additional LAN or online components. Boo hoo.

Escape From Butcher Bay's AI is excellent, with guards that will fall back, outflank you and hunt together, shining their torches in every nook and cranny trying to flush you out of hiding while also goading you with insults and taunts. In one situation, I was sneaking above a couple of prison guards; they spotted me and proceeded to shoot out the metal grates in the floor, causing Riddick to fall down painfully onto the corridor below. This is a great example of the physics engine, which enables lights to be shot out, windows shattered, alarms destroyed and ragdoll bodies to be shot or hilariously pushed off ledges into rock-crushing machines.

Yet the most important part of the *Riddick* universe is Eye Shine, his ability to see in the dark – and in *Butcher Bay*, you'll witness how he's given his special powers those distinctive black specs.

Eye Shine is a gameplay convention that works really well – just one tap on the keyboard and a completely dark corridor is suddenly

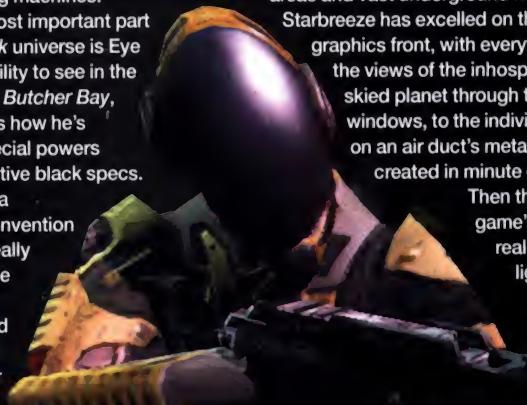
fully illuminated. Of course, this can be used to give you the advantage over enemies with superior firepower, so sabotaging an electrical access panel turns off lights and enables you to creep up on unsuspecting enemies without detection. Eye Shine is always available too, with no batteries or power bar to contend with as you attempt to escape.

LOOKING GOOD

Butcher Bay prison itself is a beautifully-realised, self-contained world, made up of grubby cells, rusting air vents, decaying lifts, dimly-lit corridors with leaky steam pipes, nondescript storage areas and vast underground mines.

Starbreeze has excelled on the graphics front, with everything from the views of the inhospitable red-skied planet through the dusty windows, to the individual rivets on an air duct's metal plating created in minute detail.

Then there's the game's fantastic real-time lighting – as good as





You battle against heavily-armed mechs in later levels.



The NHS shows off its latest high-tech hospital.

anything in *Doom 3* – which has Riddick himself projecting shadows on walls and floors, torches that light up rooms and corridors realistically even down to the particles of dust caught in their beams, and searchlights that shine through fences casting patterns onto characters. All the in-game character models are extremely detailed too, with believable muscle and skin, textured clothing that moves in the correct way, pock-marked and scarred faces and some of the best motion-captured animation I've seen. This is especially true during the third-person views of Riddick's

'action moves', such as climbing ladders and boxes, and hanging from rails.

Level design ranges from claustrophobic air-conditioning ducts

"All the in-game character models are extremely detailed, with superb motion-captured animation"

(where would we be without them?), to huge, wide-open mining shafts, each containing multiple pathways that can get a little confusing if you don't pay attention to your mission briefings and

FISTS OF FURY

BUTCHER BAY'S PUNCH-UPS ARE THE BEST YET IN AN FPS

Hand-to-hand combat in first-person shooters has never been successfully done before. Yes, you can punch in *Doom*, for example, but using your fists is usually a last resort when you run out of ammo. However, *Escape From Butcher Bay* is the first FPS to do punch-ups properly, as an actual alternative to using weapons, and it works brilliantly.

Using the left and right mouse button in combination with the movement keys, you can pull off a wide variety of visceral punches, blocks and attacks, which visibly bruises opponents' faces and sends arcs of blood splattering against walls and floors. You can also augment your attacks with melee weapons such as a knuckle-duster, a club and every inmate's favourite possession, a blade or shiv.



"Yo! Wassup bro?"



Eye Shine lights up dark places.



the universe created by David Twohy, but setting it before the events in *Pitch Black* means that Starbreeze and Vin Diesel's own Tigon Studios have had the freedom to produce a solid videogame and quality characters, without having to slavishly follow a movie plot. In addition, this new PC version has proper mouse control, quick-saves, developer's commentary – similar to director commentaries on DVDs – and a smattering of new weapons and levels.

SURPRISE SURPRISE

The game's major criticisms at this stage are the lack of multiplayer (see 'Why Don't You?', opposite), along with its minimal length – approximately ten hours. In addition, although there aren't any vehicles as such, you do get to ride in something much later in *Butcher Bay*, but we won't spoil the surprise for you – it's one of the best bits in the game.

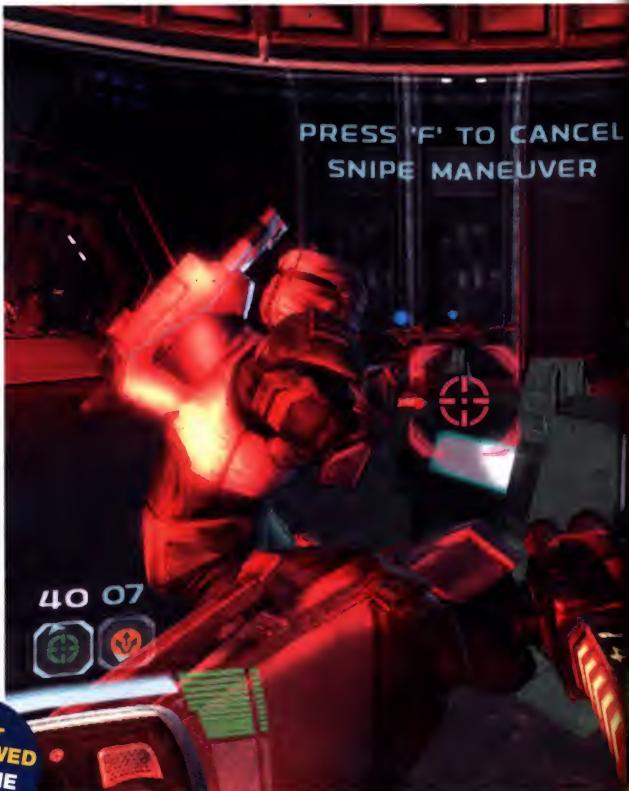
Escape From Butcher Bay isn't going to be as ground-breaking as *Half-Life 2*, but if you're looking for a title with a great melting pot of genres, mixing stealth, horror, RPG, sci-fi, fighting and action, you could do a lot worse than enjoy a stretch with Richard B Riddick and his merry inmates. We'll have the definitive verdict next issue, along with an exclusive playable demo – just don't drop the soap in the showers... ☺

atmospheric soundtrack and numerous side-quests, you're always entertained, with your trigger finger tensed.

The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay manages to expand



We're talking pre-Empire Republic here, so you're not necessarily the bad guys...



Clone 07 is your sniper, but you can be the sharpshooter too.

This party's still not over...

STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO

LAST
PREVIEWED
PCZONE
ISSUE
142

It's like a squad-based *Halo*, with clone troopers and droids and Wookiees – and you're not excited?! Will Porter finds your lack of faith disturbing

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER LucasArts
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE www.lucasarts.com
ETA March 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- LucasArts has pulled its socks up
- Nicely streamlined squad combat
- Set between the close of *Episode II* and the start of *Episode III*
- Spectacular levels, monsters and environments
- Great incidental events and animation

YOU'RE probably not as excited about this game as you should be. Now I'm a practicing *Episode II* apologist (despite generally not straying as far as *The Phantom Menace*) so I'm about to attempt to scrub away the encrusted Jar-Jar cynicism from your preconceptions and show you that this is looking like the most streamlined squad shooter we've seen in many a year.

Reason for apathy #1 in your hearts and minds could be that this is a prequel game, starting up in the Clone Wars a few

hours after Yoda "around the survivors, a perimeter created" and ending up on Kashyyyk in a battle that sets up many of the events of *Episode III*. I'm not even going to attempt to bridge any divide between you and the bearded one, but let me just say *Republic Commando* isn't going to subsidise on licence alone. (Though saying that, there's still a lot for fanboys to salivate over, including a plethora of thermal detonators, giant Wookiees, Geonosians, the bodyguards of *Episode III* baddie General Grievous and a

chapter set on a proto-Star Destroyer.)

Away from all the Skywalker stuff though, *Republic Commando* is looking like a highly competent military squad shooter on its own merits, albeit one very much in an arcade *Freedom Fighters* mould.

Alongside a basic command system that



Droids get blasted to bits with pretty satisfying results.





Could this repair some of the pain of Episodes I and II?



Wipe them out. All of them.



"Come on chaps! Last one there's a sissy."

The game's debt to *Metroid Prime* is pretty apparent.

INCIDENTALLY SPEAKING

VISUAL FLAIR AND NEAT ANIMATIONS ADD LIFE TO THE LICENCE

When a character in *Republic*

Commando takes out an enemy, there's every chance that the normal pattern of "monster shot, monster falls, monster dead" will be replaced with one of many classy "finishing move" animations. You might see a Clone Trooper kick a droid to the floor and shoot it in the face, a Geonosian spun around by the shoulders and blasted in the chest or a Wookiee throwing a droid into the air and ripping its arms off. Added to this array of fun will be the tendency for

Trandoshans (the same lizard-race as

Bok the Bounty Hunter in *Empire*) to fly helplessly into the air when you zap their booster-packs. Chaos, but fun chaos, seems to be the order of the day.



Trandoshans: Wookiee hating scum.

either has your squad pushing forward or following politely behind you, a neat one-touch system can set your guys to plant explosives, take up a sniping position or carry out a tactical door-breach with the help of a few concussion grenades. Obviously this isn't far different from the "high-level squad-tactics" blurb that accompanies clag like the *Conflict* games, but here it honestly appears to work.

This is aided and abetted by some impressive AI on the part of your squad, who do neat things like ducking when they run past your line of fire, using health terminals without being prompted, running away from imminent explosions and swapping casual banter on what you're doing and who you're killing.

The idea is to create the illusion of a being part of a

crack unit, giving your squad a high enough degree of consciousness to look after themselves in a firefight (always finding cover and rarely needing advice on running away when a droid army is pummelling them), while still giving you enough control to set them up in decent positions or allow some realistic teamplay. Even when you've been blasted into a motionless pile of plastic armour you'll be relying on them to revive you – after they've slain all the badness in the vicinity that is, unless you've ordered them otherwise.

AND WHOSE ARMY?

The official names of your squaddies are Clone numbers 62, 07 and 40, but they're better known as Scorch, Sev and Fixer – each with their own (conveniently) developed personalities that defy their dour kiwi origins. Scorch blows stuff up and cracks jokes, Fixer hacks machines

and plays the straight man and Sev's a ruthless psycho who's a crack-shot with a sniper rifle. All of you have been freshly cultivated from the loins of Jango Fett, and your own development from floating tank-baby-through to the donning of your helmet is impressively covered in first-person flashbacks at the opening of the game. The action then moves on to a scene reminiscent of the start of *Half-Life: Opposing Force*, with your dropship flying over Geonosis, allied craft dropping like flies around you, eventually dumping you in the wreckage of the *Episode II* arena.

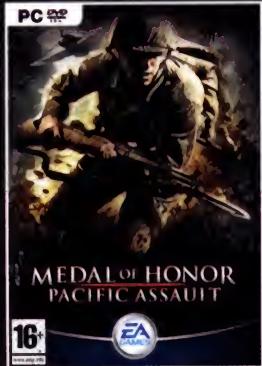
"There's a myriad of neat touches that mark this out as a game with a twinkle in its battered visor"

Moving on from here there are many and varied Geonosian spires to infiltrate and war rooms to fill with blaster-holes, all the while marvelling (as you tend to do these days) at the spectacular physics effects that send droid-parts flying and wounded Geonosians limply fluttering.

Over the game's 15 missions and three major environments (Geonosis, the Republic Assault Ship and Kashyyyk) there's a myriad of neat touches that, once you witness them, mark out *Republic Commando* as a game with

a twinkle in its battered visor. Note, for example, the way that enemies kick thermal detonators back at you when they land at their feet – at which point your squad can pick them up and re chuck them should their sci-fi fuses be long enough. Note again (and I apologise for referencing a wonderful game that couldn't be less of a PC title if it tried) the clear nod to *Metroid Prime* in the helmet visor that can be alternately smashed, steamed up, rained upon or gooped – and then wiped clean by an unobtrusive *Star Wars*™ laser-windscreens-wiper.

It's these little touches that show that *Republic Commando* is distancing itself from the conveyor-belt franchise releases that LucasArts has become synonymous with in recent times. There honestly appears to be some serious love going into this game, and not simply the blatant dollar-spinning of yore. If you've fallen out your long-running *Star Wars* romance through the prequels, then, for this game at least, you should unlearn what you have learned. Otherwise you could be missing out. 



MEDAL OF HONOR PACIFIC ASSAULT™

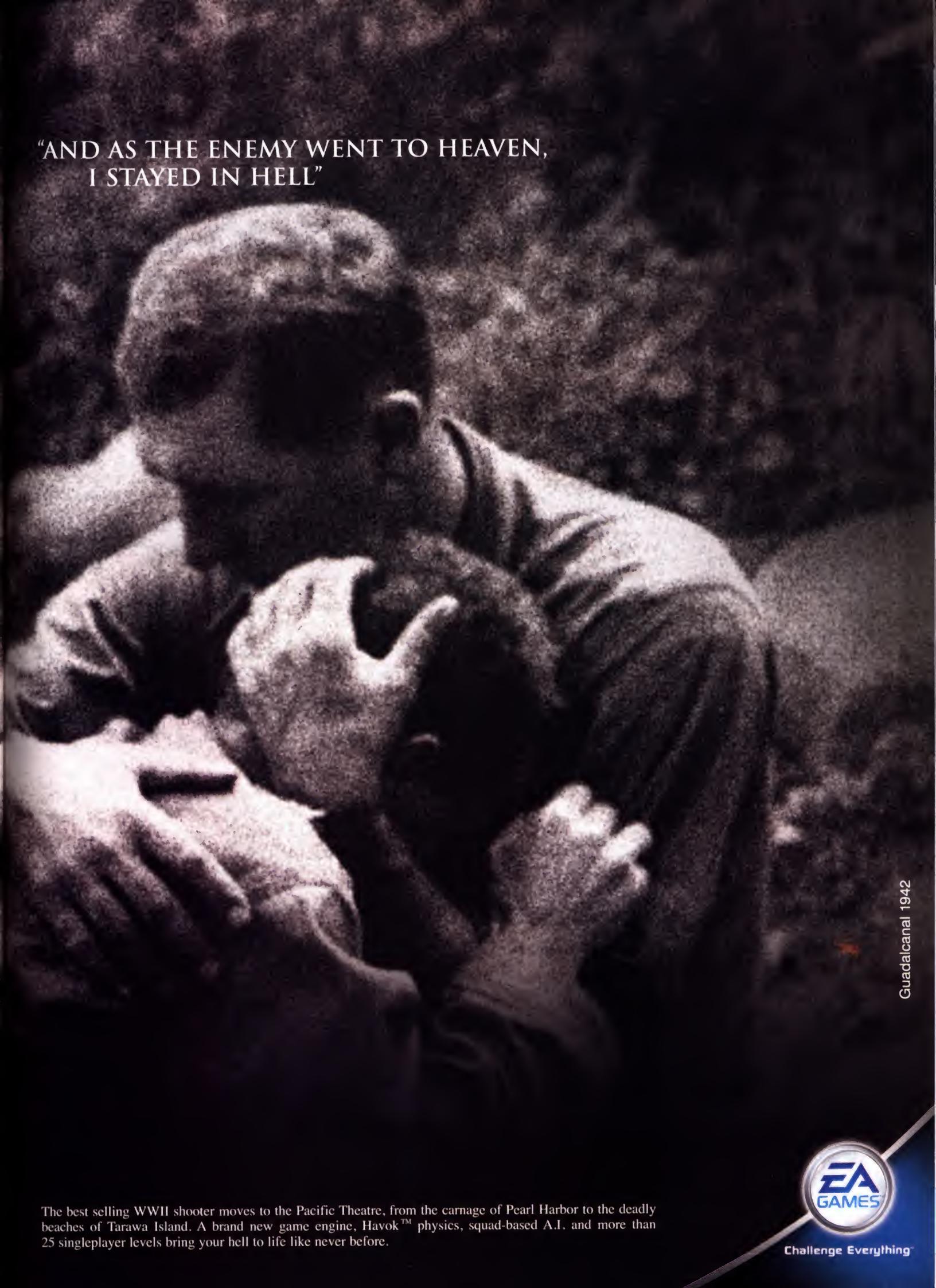
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I STAYED IN HELL"



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"These damn space-roaches get bigger every year."



"Whoa, watch where you point that thing. You'll have an arm off."



A knight of an even older republic.

The Dark Knight returns...

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC II: THE SITH LORDS

Will Porter realises he's about to feel a great disturbance in his sleep patterns. Again...

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Obsidian Entertainment
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE www.lucasarts.com/games/swkotor_sithlords
ETA February

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's KOTOR. It's back
- Obsidian has some highly talented RPG bards
- Tweaked engine, more baddies, prettier environments
- 60 new feats and force powers
- The hilarious HK-47 is back. Hoorah!

THE REASON

I've been disrespectfully late for work every single, solitary morning this month is because by night I'm a nefarious smuggler turned hero of the Old Republic. In fact, I'm Boba Carolgees, Jedi-in-waiting and, accompanied by a jailbait Twi'lek and a grumpy bitch, the fate of the galaxy lies in my hands. KOTOR, the best *Star Wars* story since *The Empire Strikes Back* and the best RPG in years, has consumed me once again. But it looks like this, my friends, was only the beginning.

The pedigree of the people creating *Knights Of The Old Republic II: The Sith Lords* is unsurpassed. Handed the golden sabre by BioWare, Obsidian has talent that approaches RPG royalty. The company boasts alumni from the likes of *Icewind Dale* and the *Baldur's Gate* series and a lead designer (one Chris Avellone) who also pulled lead duties on the sublime *Planescape: Torment*. In these terms alone we shouldn't have too much to worry about, but seeing as

CV

OBSIDIAN
ENTERTAINMENT

OBSIDIAN GAMES

The powers of levelling-up combine in RPG dream-team Obsidian.

2003 Obsidian is formed at the heart of 'The O.C.' (that's Orange County, California to non-T4 viewers). Coming from places like Interplay's defunct Black Isle studio, Blizzard, Neversoft and EA, big-league RPG names like Chris Avellone (*Planescape: Torment*) and Feargus Urquhart (*Baldur's Gate*) are attached.

2004 BioWare announces that it's handing the reins on both *KOTOR II* and *Neverwinter Nights II* to their best pals at Obsidian, while the *Baldur's Gate* creator beavers away at other forthcoming greatness.





"I hate these stupid fan conventions..."

the brief is basically to provide a game of the same template, with a tweaked engine and a darker tone, it's highly unlikely that fans will be disappointed.

The game opens five years after the close of *KOTOR* with the trusty Ebon

If you're an experienced vibroblade twiddler then you'll notice right away that things haven't changed all that much – pretty much all the menus and character points are just where you left them. There are some things that will streamline your

"It could be the *Empire Strikes Back* to the original game's *New Hope* – darker and more dangerous throughout"

Hawk floating aimlessly in space near Peragus – a planet scarred by fuel mining and surrounded by unstable debris. You're the last known surviving Jedi, you're unconscious and it's all up to a plucky T3 unit to save your freshly created character – the trials of whom make for a skipable tutorial. Back-story neatly taken care of, your ship is then led into the bowels of a nearby mining colony, and your injured avatar into one of those trademark *Star Wars* healing-tank/scuba-gear combos. Here your amnesiac Jedi meets a mysterious old woman, and your adventure begins.

pursuit of experience points – such as an option to switch between different weapon set-ups on the fly to make swapping between blasting and a melee bundle less cumbersome – but overall it's the game we know and love, with all the same depths and the same eccentricities.

Obviously (what with you being the last known Jedi and everything) the usual stockpile classes of scoundrel, scout and soldier can be waylaid, and you can just leap straight into the Jedi order without the Force-less preamble of the first game. Now, you can be an inordinately force-savvy Counsellor, a battle-trained Guardian or middle-man Sentinel straight from the off. There are 17 new character heads for your Jedi to choose from as



"Er... tell me again why we're flying straight into the heart of the black hole?"



Star Wars: The Ballet.

well, all of them mildly attractive, and this time round the code's been tweaked to allow for full-flowing Jedi robes – something which, if you think about it, was sorely lacking in the original game.

OPTIMISE PRIME

This same fiddling has meant the engine is now firing on all cylinders, and environmental effects that were previously only available on their lonesome (grass, weather effects, flowing water, flashy particle effects and the like) are now combined with aplomb.

There's also the capacity to handle far more enemies on screen, which immediately ups the excitement of the battles. One rumble I witnessed outside a Sith Temple on the planet of Dxum had my jaw hitting the floor with the sheer number of dark-siders milling about.

But what other things could I mention that'll ignite the *KOTOR* geek inside you? Over 60 new feats and force powers might tickle your fancy – including Force Scream (a power you can't quite imagine being used by Sir Alec Guinness) and the decidedly dark-side Force Crush (great for making fresh juices). Elsewhere, a visit to Carth's home planet of Tilos (or, at least what remains of it) is on the cards, along with the triumphant return of assassin droid HK-47 – undoubtedly the best comedy sidekick we've seen in many a year.

This is a game that Obsidian is touting as the *Empire Strikes Back* to the original game's *New Hope* – a tale with a darker tone and a feeling of constant danger throughout. And from what we've seen there's absolutely no reason to doubt them or their ability. *KOTOR II* is out next February, so we advise you to book some sick days off now. ☺

MUCH TO LEARN, KOTOR II HAS

HOW DO YOU MAKE A SEQUEL TO AN OPEN-ENDED GAME? WATCH AND LEARN...

So just who is dead and who is alive? Who was male and who was female? Who became evil and who remained pure? *The Sith Lords* takes place five years after *KOTOR* and, although a little bit of balance has been brought to the galaxy, the way in which people played through the first game must still be seen to hold sway in the second. Cleverly then, and doubly so seeing as first-timers won't even notice it, *The Sith Lords* will take key dialogue choices you make early in the game (hinting at, for example, whether certain people were generally good sorts or evil bastards), and collate them to find out just who was alive, dead, good or evil in the game that you played. From this you'll be able to come across various character cameos (or not, if they snuffed it) and play within a world at least partly of your own creation.



Your experiences in *KOTOR* still count.



Humans are strictly banned from Scrapland.

Rise of the robots... SCRAPLAND

Jamie Sefton tightens his nuts for a tour of android paradise



You can hack into a server and 'steal' a variety of other robot personas.



If this is the developers' idea of sexy, we're deeply concerned.



Check out the robots doing, er... robot stuff.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Mercury Steam
PUBLISHER Deep Silver
WEBSITE scrapland.mercurysteam.com
ETA January 28

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Open GTA-style gameplay, where you can play as 15 characters
- Huge indoor and outdoor locations
- Interact with hundreds of robot NPCs
- Multiplayer games over LAN and Internet

ROBOTS KICK shiny metal ass. From the pimping thievery of Bender to the murderous AI routines of the T-1000, our android buddies have been consistently invading popular culture for nearly a century. Taking advantage of this continuing affection for the clinking of cogs and camshafts, Spanish company Mercury Steam is creating the third-person sci-fi action-adventure *Scrapland*, set on a robotic asteroid world created from the discarded and rusting metal from a long-gone human civilisation.

BUFFING THE DROID

Since we last saw a glimpse of the game back in issue 123, mildly renowned developer American McGee (of *Doom* and *Alice* fame) has joined the team, adding a sprinkling of his twisted humour to the characters and storyline. You play through the game as D-Tritus, a kind of robotic Guybrush Threepwood, who arrives at Scrapland looking for work, and is eventually offered a job considered the worse in the universe – journalist.

Scrapland is structured very much like *Grand Theft Auto*, with a huge world to explore, as well as structured missions,

races and hidden challenges. However, instead of a gritty urban setting, *Scrapland* has an impressive and actually quite beautiful *Blade Runner/Tron* future-scape. Its mixture of indoor and outdoor locations are populated by hundreds of NPCs going about their business – avoiding police, blasting each other in flying ships, nightclubs, running various businesses and gambling.

D-Tritus can fly about the world in his ship, completing bizarre missions that range from destroying other craft for a robot called the Crazy Gambler, to sneaking into a high security building to take photos of a murdered android Archbishop – don't ask, it's all part of the plot. When on foot you can interact with any character – having conversations, getting advice, learning more about *Scrapland* – all shot through with a sense of humour reminiscent of the *Monkey Island* adventures and Matt Groening's *Futurama*, with banks of skeezy machines, camp computers and sarcastic silicon chips.

The most original aspect of *Scrapland* though, has to be the Great Database,

which is a back-up for robots, imbued with religious significance, that keeps a copy of everyone and instantly restores any machine lifeform if they die. More importantly, the Great Database is later used by D-Tritus to "steal" other personalities, transforming you into more than a dozen other characters with unique powers, including a sexy assistant called Betty who can cause a huge explosive wave, and a chief of police who can, erm, belch loudly.

PEDAL TO THE METAL

Although some futuristic games can seem rather cold, *Scrapland* has a great deal of potential, with zippy ships to pilot around the neon cityscapes, nonsensical mini-games, colourful characters and snappy wise-ass dialogue. American McGee has obviously had a big influence on the direction of the game, which so easily could have been an impenetrable mess, but now might have the makings of a cult classic. We'll get into the nuts and bolts of *Scrapland* next issue with a full review. In the meantime, check out the hot 'bots for yourself with the playable demo on this month's DVD. Biddy biddy biddy.



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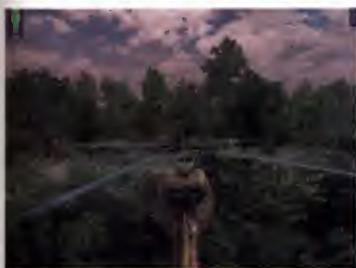


You have complete freedom of action: kill lots of people, or just frolic merrily in the stream. (We recommend the former.)

Daaaaamn hot...

BOILING POINT: ROAD TO HELL

Michael Filby loves the jungle. Apart from the spiders. And the snakes. And the swarms of angry men with guns...



Vehicles are vital in the huge map.



It's quiet... too quiet.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Deep Shadows
PUBLISHER Atari
WEBSITE www.deep-shadows.com
ETA Spring 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Mixture of FPS and RPG, with a hint of *Grand Theft Auto*
- Massive, dynamically loading environment
- Loads of upgradeable weapons and 25 vehicles, including tanks and helicopters
- Freeform play where you can follow or ignore the stories
- Formerly known as *Xenus*

Schaefer. "We want the player to have complete freedom, but every decision you make will have consequences."

Developer Deep Shadows hopes to achieve this with a dynamic similar to *GTA* – you can basically pick and choose which missions to follow and when to carry them out. As well as missions that will progress the main story, there are objectives that will earn you cash to buy weapons or equipment. You can earn a crust by doing anything from being a bus driver, hunter or hitman.

Whether or not you follow the main story (or one of the many promised subplots), you're going to need cash to gain a licence for one of the game's 25 vehicles, as the map is huge. Alternatively, you can (with the aid of a sizeable weapon) relieve one of the locals of their transportation by force. The consequences referred to by Schaefer are that your actions can affect your standing with one of six dangerous factions populating the area. With many of the missions and activities having some bearing on one faction or another, chances are that you won't end up pleasing everybody.



The heat-seeking anti-air bazooka is one of the more satisfying weapons.



Boiling Point is brought to you by the chaps who did *Codename: Outbreak*.



A well-stocked inventory is vital when assaulting a base.

Although *Boiling Point* still has a few months left in development, the code we saw was surprisingly impressive. We spent ages simply exploring the game's 625 square kilometre world, busying ourselves with bailing out of helicopters and landing in piranha-infested rivers, then having to deal with water snakes on the shore. Later on, we discovered the joys of taking out a doctor with a pot of jam to the head, then standing back to watch him being finished off by the swarm of angry flies it attracted.

STEAMING INTO ACTION

While the engine is technically and aesthetically impressive – the environment dynamically loads as you move around – *Boiling Point*'s success ultimately depends upon the strength and execution of its sprawling world. For example, we found the controls to be sometimes rather unfriendly and fiddly, particularly during combat. The feel of living, breathing cities isn't quite there yet either. However, Deep Shadows has until next spring to tighten things up, so there's still plenty of cause for excitement. More news soon. 



PlayStation.2





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www.easports.co.uk/fifafootball2005

IF MY FACE ISN'T FAMILIAR YOU'LL RECOGNISE MY GOALS

Andriy Shevchenko

What makes a player great? On the pitch, it's not about image. The boot deal. Or the celebrity girlfriend. It's about ability. It's about great first-touch.

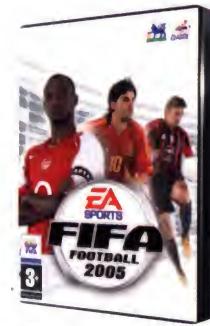
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REVIEWS

THE DEFINITIVE LOWDOWN ON ALL THE LATEST PC GAMES

XMAS CHEER



■ ASSOCIATE EDITOR Jamie Sefton

Ho ho ho! Merry Christmas! Admittedly, sat here writing about our Christmas issue in mid-October is a little ludicrous, but the festive period must indeed be approaching when we get such a bumper collection of PC games to review. The biggie this month is of course our cover exclusive, *The Lord Of The Rings: The Battle For Middle-Earth*, which right from our world-first hands-on last year has oozed class as easy as Treebeard oozes sap. Of course, having what is basically the Westwood *Command & Conquer* development team behind the game helps, as does the fact that EA has unlimited access to New Line's juicy official movie licence – you can read Martin 'Balrog' Korda's review on page 56.

Another major happening this issue is the review of the latest *Medal Of Honor* game, *Pacific Assault*. Unfortunately, what was once the benchmark for WWII shooters now seems to be only treading sea water, with the *Call Of Duty* franchise – made by the ex-development team of *MoH* – leading the bayonet charge on PC. Young whippersnapper Will 'Banzai' Porter is our war correspondent, and you can read his live report from the trenches on page 74. Also exclusive this month, we have two games returning to our screens after a long break – *Sid Meier's Pirates!* and *Leisure Suit Larry*. Both have able seamen and a Jolly Roger or two, but with very different results – check out the write-ups for each on page 68 and 72 respectively.

Finally, for football fans, we have reviews of the two best PC games available – *Football Manager 2005* (*Champ Man* in all but name), and *Pro Evolution Soccer 4*. Yours truly reviewed *PES4* (page 62), and having taken part in no less than three *PES* competitions recently, winning one and reaching the semi-final of another, I reckon you can say that it's written by a bona-fide expert. Just don't tell Dave Woods. He beat me 2-0 yesterday...



LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH 56

From the *Command & Conquer* developer comes a strategy epic based on Tolkien's book and Jackson's trilogy. To war!

THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

Some people (mainly games publishers) say that our scoring system is harsh. It's not. It's honest and built around the seemingly outdated idea that 50 per cent is an average score. Likewise, 70 per cent is a good score, anything above 80 per cent is excellent, and 90 per cent and above is a Classic (see below). Talking of Classic awards, don't expect to see one every issue as we don't chuck them around like confetti.

OUR REVIEWERS

We think our reviewers are the best in the business. Each one is a specialist in numerous genres and will have played every major release, so no game is judged in isolation. We also

make sure the right game gets reviewed by the right person, which means you won't see Steve Hill reviewing an RPG and we won't let Will loose on *FIFA Football 2005*. You can have your say on the games and our reviews as well. If you have a comment to make, please email your views to letters@pczone.co.uk and entitle your email 'Feedback'.

OUR PCS

We test games on a variety of systems so we can report how they perform in the real world. All our reviewed games are played on the manufacturer's minimum specification, as well as our own top-end rig – the Area-51 from Alienware (below).



Only games that score 90 per cent or more receive the coveted Classic award. The best of the best.



The second tier award for games scoring between 80 and 89 per cent. Essential purchases.

MEET THE TEAM



DAVE WOODS

Pro Evolution Soccer 4

Merry – it perfectly describes my most common state of being. I am seeking help.

JAMIE SEFTON

PES4, The Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay
Aragorn, because he has heroic qualities nearly as great as mine. Ahem.

QUESTIONS

1. Currently playing?

2. Which *Lord Of The Rings* character do you most identify with?

**64****FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005**
Premier League or Sunday league?**72****LEISURE SUIT LARRY: MCL**
The king of charm is back**102****REALITY CHECK**
Steve Hill, champagne and girls**104****SUPERTEST**
Adult games get the once-over

DEFINITIVE REVIEWS

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 94 **FAIR STRIKE**
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 96 **REPLAY**
IL-2 STURMOVIC: FORGOTTEN BATTLES, CONFLICT: DESERT STORM, HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC IV AND MANY MORE
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STEVE HILL IS LEISURE SUIT LARRY
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GROWN-UP GAMES GRAB THE SPOTLIGHT

**PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4 62****SID MEIER'S PIRATES! 68****MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT 74****ANTHONY HOLDEN***FlatOut, THUG2***STEVE O'HAGAN***Rome: Total War, PES4***STEVE HILL***Football Manager 2005***WILL PORTER***KOTOR, MoH: Pacific Assault, Camgo***RICHIE SHOEMAKER***Pirates!***PAUL PRESLEY***City Of Heroes, EverQuest II (beta) and the GTR demo*

For his name alone, it has to be Shagrat (one of the Uruk-Hai captains).

That farmer whose crops are ruined by the hobbits – probably meant a famine back in the Shire

None of them. It's a work of fiction.

It would have to be one of the hobbits or Gollum, or anyone else small and insignificant...

Gollum. It's like looking in the mirror.

39th Orc, 2nd-row back, Battle for Helm's Deep. I like the feeling of hopeless anonymity.



THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH



■ £34.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: EA Pacific | ETA: December 10 | lordoftherings.eagames.com

REQUIRES PIII 800, 128MB RAM and a 32MB GeForce 2 or equivalent 3D card DESIRES P4 2.4GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Martin Korda sounds the horn to herald the arrival of one of the most anticipated RTS games of the year. *The Battle For Middle-Earth* is about to begin...

IT'S FINALLY happened. After a decade of dominance, then diminishment, the tried, tested and tired ethos of real-time strategy development born from the *Command & Conquer* phenomenon is coming to an end. *LOTR: The Battle For Middle-Earth* is a bold step away from the predictable mainstream RTS formula that has been prevalent in so many games of this genre for far too

long, melding the best of the mainstream and hardcore markets in one exquisite, shiny package.

Based on all three films from Peter Jackson's titanic trilogy, this is a work of supreme detail and quality, shoehorning many of the celluloid adventures' best merits and moments into two campaigns (Good and Evil) of equal excellence, tension and entertainment.

As you'd expect from a high-budget game based on one of the most accomplished trilogies ever created, *TBFME* simply brims with references and content from the films. From the voiceovers (well, most of them anyway) and storylines to the map of Middle-earth and the replication of each character and unit, it's authentic enough to satisfy Tolkien fans, yet rarely

"Based on all three films from Jackson's trilogy, this is a work of supreme detail and quality"



IN PERSPECTIVE

ROME: TOTAL WAR

Reviewed Issue 148, Score 93%

The king of the RTS genre, *Rome* is bereft of real-time resource gathering. Instead, it's divided up into a turn-based strategy map and a 3D RTS battle section, the latter providing gargantuan, strategic battles that make *TBFME*'s skirmishes look like street scuffles.

WARCRAFT III:

REIGN OF CHAOS

Reviewed Issue 119, Score 85%

Showing its age now, but bearing more than a passing resemblance to *TBFME*, its battles are smaller and far less tactical, while visually it doesn't even come close to competing. However, its storyline is excellent, and if you enjoy epic fantasy tales, it's still worth playing.

SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII

Reviewed Issue 144, Score 90%

Fantasy not your thing? Then check out this superbly realistic and highly tactical WWII game. It may not look great, but once you get playing, the perfectly crafted gameplay will suck you in like a bloody big hoover.



Well-executed cavalry charges are devastating.

overwhelming to a *Lord of the Rings* newcomer.

From the very first time the sprawling map of Middle-earth unfurls on your monitor, you're left in no doubt about the game's quality. The boxy, clunky interface of RTS games of old has been replaced by a beautifully streamlined and intuitive control system that dispenses with the tedium of manually upgrading buildings and the necessity to construct just one unit at a time. Every

command is now just two or three mouse clicks away, while troops now spawn in squads. Meaning? Well for starters, raising an army takes a fraction of the time than in many other RTS games, giving you more time to concentrate on combat and conquering your opponent. And that's got to be a good thing, right?

GOOD VS EVIL

While the two campaigns are fairly unique in terms of



Rohan vs Warg. Charge!



Elven archers spike the enemy.

storyline, both feature the same three mission categories. The simplest of these are the Fellowship missions, which task you with either leading the Ring Bearer (Frodo) and his protectors safely through dangerous territories such as the Mines of Moria, or (if you're playing the Evil campaign), thwarting the Fellowship's progress. These are quick-fire missions that are usually over within 15-20 minutes, more action-based than strategic and usually bereft of any type of resource management.

Defensive and offensive siege missions require you to either fortify your defences before repelling an enemy assault, or mass your forces and storm an enemy stronghold. The defensive levels are without question the most emotionally enthralling

sections of *TBFME*, with your outnumbered forces struggling against seemingly insurmountable odds. Things reach a feverish climax of adrenal gland-drying carnage towards the game's latter stages, when you get to relive the visually spectacular battles of Helm's Deep and Minas Tirith.

During the few precious moments you're given before the enemy swarm upon you, you must frantically line your walls with archers, identify the different tiers of each fortress (so you can fall back and regroup when things are looking bleak) and plug any holes in your defences.

Suddenly, the uneasy calm is broken by war horns, heralding the arrival of the enemy and the commencement of hostilities. Men quiver in fear

as the enemy approaches, just one example of the many emotions depicted by the game's intuitive Emotion engine. Your ears pound with rushing blood, bellowed war cries and finally, the clashing of steel as baying orcs and Uruk-Hai scale the walls with siege ladders and pound at your buckling gates with fearsome battering rams. And save for a few clumsy moments (especially if you're attacking) when your troops won't do as you tell them to, there's very little to find fault with in these encounters.

THREE'S COMPANY

The third mission type – base-building and conquering – is also the most common. It'll be instantly familiar if you're an RTS fan, tasking you to build bases and expand your holdings on the map to try to strangle your opponent's resource gathering capabilities and ultimately eliminate every enemy unit and building from the level.

While Helm's Deep isn't quite as epic as in *The Two Towers*, it's still a thrilling level.

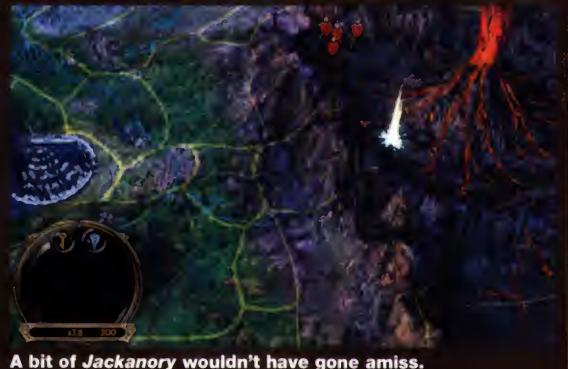
“Defensive levels are the most enthralling, your forces struggling against the odds”



Cave trolls can take out whole groups of enemies with just one lethal swipe.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

WE WANT TO KNOW MORE
While the game's storyline does expand on the films in terms of battles and scenarios we didn't see in the trilogy, it would have been even better had it expanded on some of the ideas that the films touched upon. How about going into Aragorn's background and long life, Gandalf's true angelic identity and the catalyst which made Saruman pledge his allegiance to Sauron? Oh well, I suppose you can't have everything, eh?



A bit of Jackanory wouldn't have gone amiss.

These maps are dotted with designated base-spawning areas, some of which enable you (or the enemy) to build mighty fortresses that you can pack with an array of buildings, while others act as smaller outposts with only three spaces on which to erect new structures.

With the location of your bases out of your hands, you're literally forced to explore each level and track down new building sites, then defend them against enemy onslaughts, a feature which really bolsters the game's strategic depth.

Once you've built a base, you can start producing units and upgrades, such as improved swords, armour and shields. The more units or items a building produces, the more experience it gains. Once you've used a building enough, it automatically upgrades to the next level, unlocking new units and power-ups for you to explore and construct. It's a beautifully simple interface, and with little micro-management clogging up your time and

attention, there's plenty more scope for concentrating on the action-haemorrhaging battles.

THE BITCHING HOUR

But first, a complaint. There's one very major fault with some of *TBFME*'s base-building missions, something that's blighted these types of games for a decade and that sadly hasn't been fully rectified here.

With resource gathering still playing a major role in proceedings (farms and

blacksmiths for the Good side, lumber yards, furnaces and slaughterhouses for the Evil side), these levels can at times deteriorate into wars of attrition, with neither side being able to seize the initiative. Either that, or they're just too damn easy.

When the former happens, missions can become ultra-frustrating and repetitive, with enemy attacks concentrated on the same few locations with exactly the same types of unit. By the time you do finally

I CAN BE YOUR HERO, BABY

ENRIQUE'S NOT HERE, BUT CHOOSE ONE OF THESE



ARAGORN

Everybody's favourite bearded ranger is also one of the game's toughest units. With a lorry-load of hit points, he's also a master swordsman and later on in the game, he can summon small groups of undead warriors to fight by his side.



GANDALF

If there was one let-down in the films, it was that Gandalf rarely cast spells. You can rectify that by decimating enemies with a Lightning Sword incantation, and a magnificent Wizard Push spell which hurls enemies across the level.



LEGOLAS

He may not be able to deliver a line of dialogue very convincingly, but this boy sure can fight. With the ability to fire several arrows at a time as well as adeptly wield a sword, he's perfect as your first and last line of defence in any battle.



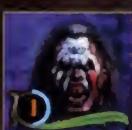
GIMLI

A short-arse he may be, but this is one dwarf who makes those midget wrestlers look like pansies. As well as being able to hurl mini-axes at his foes, he has a devastating battleaxe-area attack that literally makes the earth move.



SARUMAN

The evil white wizard possesses many similar skills and spells to Gandalf, such as Wizard Push. However, there are several differences between them, such as Saruman's Fireball spell that's perfect for attacking trees and Ents.



LURTZ

While his name makes him sound like a Nazi simpleton, Lurtz is the Uruk leader who gave Aragorn a run for his money. Special powers include Pin Hero and the ability to go berserk and kill several enemies with one sword swipe.



Make sure you stock up on archers to help take the Nazgul down.



Just charging blindly into battle is the surest way to defeat.

On to the battles, which prove to be the game's most drastic step away from *Command & Conquer* conventions. Whereas *C&C: Generals* tried to add a modicum of strategy to its 3D skirmishes, *TBFME* contains a far sharper tactical edge. For starters, mastering combined arms and height advantage, as well as utilising each unit type's strengths, weaknesses and formations (which you can combine with those of other





Use the ring's power to spread fear among the enemy. Mwah-ha-ha!

units to gain an extra advantage) are now essential skills for you.

Cavalry are excellent against infantry and archers, their charges sending stationary foot soldiers carving through the air and thudding violently onto the floor. But try charging headfirst into a well-organised group of pikemen, and you'll find horse kebab on special at most local taverns before the day's out.

Archers are nippy and great at range, but virtually useless up close, while infantry can wipe out a group of pikemen without suffering many losses. Believe me, just throwing all your men into battle and hoping they beat the AI won't get you very far here.

The sheer scope of some of the battles is immense, with scores or even hundreds of troops clashing at once. In fact,

with the exception of *Rome: Total War*, there are few other RTS games which come even close to achieving the sheer brutality and believability of virtual warfare as *TBFME*, though some of the sieges, such as Helm's Deep, could have done with being a little larger in scale. What's more, with each level also featuring at least one of your favourite heroes from the films to lead your troops into battle (see 'I Can Be Your Hero, Baby', p59), you've got a formula for some of the most captivating battle scenes ever found in an RTS.

GOOD, BAD & UGLY

And what of the units, which have been lovingly recreated from the films? Watching a sea of charging cavalry is an awesome sight, their hooves kicking up dust and rumbling

like thunder as they gallop at the enemy before hitting them like a tidal wave. Uruk-Hai pikemen march with spears, roaring gutturally and lowering their giant toothpicks at an angle to impale advancing foes, while their crossbow-toting counterparts can upgrade their projectiles with fire.

Cave trolls lumber around dumbly, picking up felled tree trunks and scattering their opponents with fierce swipes, while Balrogs are immense beasts of fire and shadow that can take to the air and call upon an array of arcane powers.

And let's not forget the graceful multi-talented elves who can become invisible in woods and fire their projectiles devastatingly far, or the gigantic Oliphants (giant elephants) with their spike-covered tusks. Best of all though are the Ents. Slow and cumbersome but powerful, these walking trees can kill dozens of enemies with one giant kick or slap, and should they come into contact with fire, run manically with arms flailing to the nearest water source to douse themselves.



Gandalf gets pushy with some orcs.



Siege missions are fantastic.

ONE RING AND EVEN A STAR

CALL UPON GREAT POWERS TO AID YOU

Apart from units, heroes, buildings, storyline, missions and resources, what else is different between playing as either Good and Evil? Funny you should ask, because both sides possess two equally powerful, though very different super weapons, which gain in power as each campaign progresses.

The foul forces of Isengard and Mordor can call upon the Power of the One Ring, which among a host of other dark powers, enables you to mat the earth with vines that entwine around enemy troops to slow their progress, and summon Balrogs.

To counter the Ring, the armies of Rohan, Gondor and The Fellowship have access to the Evenstar, which enables you to heal your men and summon huge, near-invincible armies of Oathbreakers (undead warriors) to bolster your forces.



The Ring and the Evenstar gain in power as campaigns go on.

The Battle For Middle-Earth

is simply spilling over with attention to detail, making it one of the most charming and charismatic strategy games ever created. Zoom into the breathtaking visuals and you'll find Uruks being pulled out of Uruk Pits in muddy jackets, cows being herded into

slaughterhouses and coming out the other side as giant slabs of meat and farmers tilling the land on farms. The presentation is almost above reproach (though sometimes units can act somewhat erratically), and coupled with the spine-tingling soundtrack lifted straight from the films, the whole package becomes a mesmerising ride of highs, lows and numerous thrills, with the odd frustration thrown in for good (or should that be bad) measure.

A NEW DAWN

Without question, *The Battle For Middle-Earth* is a triumph, a game which not only manages to unite the mainstream and hardcore markets, but one which sets new standards in presentation and polish.

Despite its innovations, it's accessible enough for casual gamers to master in minutes, yet it still manages to cram in just about enough strategic depth to seduce you if you're a hardcore strategist.

Sure, sometimes it can get a tad repetitive, sometimes levels can be a bit of a slog (or sometimes a little too easy for RTS veterans), but mainly, this is a thrilling, beautifully-imagined piece of programming that does the films proud.

Even if you're not a fan of the trilogy, you shouldn't hesitate in checking this out, though you'll undoubtedly get more out of it if you watch the films first. And while it may not be quite up to *Rome: Total War* standards (which RTS is at the moment?), it's still a shining light within the genre that simply shouldn't be missed. 

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Beautifully streamlined interface
- ✓ Jaw-dropping visuals
- ✓ Epic battles and castle sieges
- ✓ Hugely atmospheric
- ✓ Strategic yet accessible
- ✗ Some base building levels too repetitive and predictable
- ✗ AI sometimes a little too basic

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An epic strategic gem

Sound BLASTER AUDIGY[®] 2 ZS

AN OFFER YOU CANNOT REFUSE



SOUNDS BEST ON



THIEF
DEADLY SHADOWS

• i •

eidos

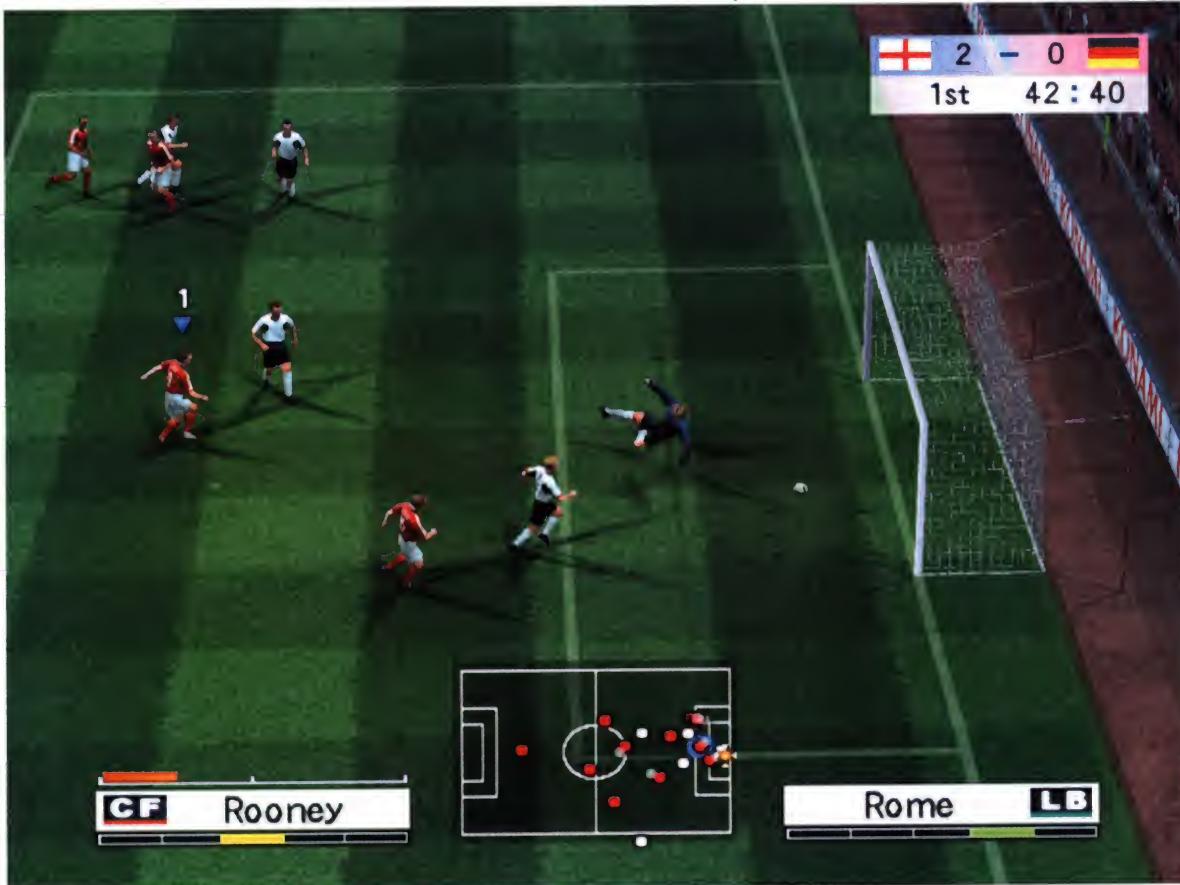
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You'll need a PS2 pad and PC adaptor to play PES4 properly.



Hernan hammers it home.

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4



■ £34.99 | Pub: Konami | Dev: Konami TYO |
ETA: November | www.konami.com

REQUIRES PIII 700, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
DESIDES P4 1.2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Hallelujah! Jamie 'Jackhammer' Sefton worships at the football temple of PES



DESPITE Leeds Utd wallowing in Championship mid-table mediocrity, my passion for football remains constant, bordering on a psychotic obsession. Anyone who doesn't support a team can't understand why fans stay in on Saturday afternoons watching Ceefax, or spend hours in the pub discussing tactics, transfers, goals and gossip with their mates.

So, it's with this in mind that I state the following – Konami's

Pro Evolution Soccer 4 is the best footie action game ever made. Fact. Anyone who disagrees is simply wrong, has never actually played PES4 or is an EA Sports representative. Even though the latest version of the game is by no means perfect, no other soccer sim

comes within a Cantonese karate kick of its glorious net-bursting magnificence.

GRASS-ROOTS

It's difficult to pinpoint exactly why *PES* is such a superb representation of the beautiful game, but the magic definitely

starts with Konami TYO's very Japanese philosophy of always being 'truthful' with the behaviour of the ball. Unlike other titles that concentrate on the player models and likenesses first, then work on how to introduce the ball later, *PES* begins with the ball physics and then builds the rest of the game around the realistic movement of the leather sphere.

As a result, you get uncannily realistic and unpredictable football matches, packed with skilful midfield build-ups, spectacular long-distance shots,

dashing runs with close-control, deft chips and frenetic goalmouth scrambles.

Pro Evolution Soccer 4 has numerous improvements since 2003's first iteration on the PC. Competing with the megabucks of EA's *FIFA* title for the official licences has always been a problem for *PES*, but even though it still lacks the all-important Premiership signatures (Merseyside Blue = Everton, for example), there are licences for the Italian, Spanish and Dutch leagues. Some of the teams are badly out-of-date,



Wet weather slows down the ball on muddy pitches.



Ronaldo gets his (big) teeth into the training mode.



Player likenesses have improved greatly since PES3.

however, so slapper-fan Rooney is still at Everton, and slap-headed Zidane is still playing for the French national side.

In any case, you can usually scour the Net for a home-made update patch soon after release to get access to the proper names of clubs and players (I like www.pesleague.com). In total, PES4 now gives you access to over 180 club and national sides, and 4,500 players, including those cool unlockable 'classic' teams, for players such as erectile dysfunction publicist Pelé.

Other cosmetic changes include an on-screen referee, improved commentary from Brackley and Brooking, no more handball decisions, the ability to set up your own custom league and various additional cut-scene animations – some good (players squaring up to each other after a

MASTERFUL

PES4'S MASTER LEAGUE IS A FOOTBALL RPG

When not challenging friends in multiplayer face-offs, the best way to enjoy *Pro Evolution Soccer* on your own is with the Master League. This is basically a *Champ Man*-lite, where you manage a club and guide them from the lower league into the top division, to championship and cup glory.

PES4 now includes four divisions with two leagues in each, the ability to use Match Mode teams (no more Castolo and Ximelez!), and, as in any RPG, young players will 'level-up' and improve their stats when they gain experience in matches. For every win or draw, you gain points that you can save up and spend on acquiring new players when the transfer window is open.

However, make sure you manage your finances properly, or you'll go bust at the end of the season and have to start again. Just like Peter Ridsdale.

bad foul), some pointless (putting the ball down on the corner spot).

Injuries to players now result in them being carried off the pitch for treatment, which adds moments of great tension to important games, as you nervously await news of your player's health while your team is temporarily reduced to ten men. Seconds later, the magic sponge will either have done its job, with the player returning to the match, or leaving in an ambulance with his teeth in a plastic bag.

INTELLIGENT BECKHAM?

However, it's in the actual gameplay where you notice the real improvements over PES3. More motion-captured animations has resulted in smoother and pacier action, with quicker reactions and turns from players, better first-touches and

"PES4 produces breathlessly exciting matches that'll have you punching the air"

flick-ons, more accurate passing and through-balls, and specific skills for certain stars, such as Cristiano Ronaldo's step-overs. Improved AI means that players are now less likely to blindly chase the ball into the corners of the pitch too, and instead look for space and produce more intelligent off-the-ball runs.

What's more, games are more physical, with additional hustle and bustle between attackers and defenders for possession of the ball, and frantic manoeuvring in the box to win headers. If anything, it's more difficult to score one-on-one against the keeper, so you have to either master the chip shot, or pass to a better-placed

team-mate. Unfortunately, throw-ins have become a little erratic, dumping the 3D view and introducing a fiddly system that often means you mistakenly gift the ball to the opposition.

Also, the pesky morale system – based on home and away status and the mentality of players – is still here, and can cause much gnashing of teeth if Brazil start playing like a Sunday league pub team when they go 2-0 down, misplacing passes and tripping over the ball.

MATCH OF THE DAY

PES4 has oodles of single-player options, including cup competitions, leagues and the addictive *Champ Man*/RPG-style

'Master League' (see 'Masterful', above). There's also a more comprehensive training mode, with useful tips and mini-games, such as free-kick practice and ball-dribbling time challenges.

Multiplayer is where you enjoy the most fun and longevity though, and as well as crowding around your PC monitor with up to eight other players, you can now challenge a friend to a match over a LAN. The fact that Konami has decided to ignore online play yet again however (apparently it was too expensive and time-consuming to do) is extremely annoying, especially when the Xbox version comes complete with Live compatibility. This is the reason we couldn't award PES4 'Classic' status.

Yet, despite our grumbling, this is arcade football action of the highest calibre. PES4 is simply exhilarating, producing breathlessly exciting matches and different styles of goals, from tap-ins to 20-yard screamers that'll have you punching the air and running around the room in celebration. I've said it before, but PES4 just *feels* like real football – other games aren't fit to clean its boots. 



Get up. You big girl.

St Steven commits an unsaintly act. Tsk.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Plays like real football
- ✓ Superb animation and ball physics
- ✓ Addictive Master League
- ✓ LAN compatibility
- ✗ No online play
- ✗ Quirky morale system
- ✗ Out-of-date team line-ups and no Premiership licence

89

Golden balls



You can even watch the highlights in either half of the split screen.



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005

£29.99 | Pub: Sega Europe | Dev: Sports Interactive | ETA: Out Now | www.footballmanager.net

REQUIRES PIII 600 and 128MB RAM for one league and small database DESIRES P4 1.8GHz and 256MB RAM

Steve Hill tackles the game formerly known as *Champ Man*

IN PERSPECTIVE

CHAMPIONSHIP

MANAGER: SEASON 03/04

Reviewed Issue 137, Score 90%
Sports Interactive's final contribution to Eidos's bank balance.

TOTAL CLUB MANAGER 2005

Reviewed Issue 148, Score 68%
Shiny 3D graphics make for a less hardcore approach to the genre.

A PAGE? A solitary page for the single most important game of the year? Fair enough – there's not a great deal in the way of eye candy, and the game is already on sale, with Bonfire Night leading to a spate of unsupervised kids maiming themselves while errant fathers got stuck into a brand new season. Chances are the majority of them have yet to emerge from the twilight world of *Football Manager 2005*, as

Sports Interactive has only gone and done it again.

Was it ever in doubt? Of course not. All that's changed is the name; the game remains the same. And with Eidos's all-new *Championship Manager 5* yet to see the light of day, it would appear to be something of an open goal. Eidos's loss is Sega's gain, as *FM2005* continues the rich heritage that Sports Interactive has established over more than a decade as genre leader. In fact, we've even already accepted the new name. If anything it's an improvement, as to the untrained mind, *Championship*



The split-screen mode lets you track the info of your choice.



For the big match atmosphere, check the full-screen mode.

Manager could refer to a dominoes tournament.

There are no spots on *Football Manager* though, which takes an improved version of the match engine from SI's 'previous game' and wraps it in a radically redesigned interface. And while for the first few hours it feels a bit like writing with your wrong hand, ultimately it's a sizeable improvement, proving far more intuitive than in the past.

WHEN SKIES ARE GREY

Of course, all this does is facilitate the descent into madness, as that familiar addiction takes hold. The time-honoured annual ritual of grey sky and green monitor has once again proven too much to resist, and as you read these words, hundreds of thousands of virtual managers are staring into middle space contemplating tactics and transfers, regardless of whether they're actually playing the game

or not. There will still always be countless people who simply 'don't understand', and in many ways they are the lucky ones, free to go about their business free of the autistic behaviour that the game engenders.

Something of a walkover then, and while *FM2005* retains a homespun feel, there's no doubting that it's the real deal. For dots on a screen to be imbued with tangible personalities is no mean feat, but it's one that SI appears to have pulled off without breaking sweat. There are a few quibbles to be had, such as the lacklustre 'mind games' feature to wind up opposing managers, and we expect the usual routine of minor patches. But when you find yourself contesting an LDV Vans tie at six in the morning, you have to concede that they've got it right. Quite simply the most addictive thing I've ever tried. And I've tried the lot.



See what you're up against in a pre-match comparison of teams.



Scouting has been improved with a practical filter interface.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Almost infinitely playable
- ✓ Improved speed
- ✓ Intuitive interface
- ✓ Comprehensive editor
- ✗ Mind games not that exciting
- ✗ Bland crowd noises
- ✗ Ruinous to sleep patterns

90

Business as usual

"Possibly the best war game ever made for the PC..."

- 92% PC ACTION

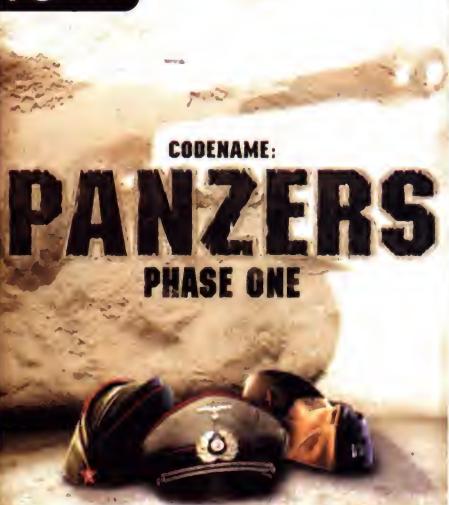


Fabulous visuals, friendly controls
and finely constructed missions."

85% **PC GAMER**

www.PANZERS.com

PC CD-ROM



+++ Axis, Allied & Russian campaigns +++ Fully destructable environment +++

+++ Single player & team/versus multiplayer mode - on & off-line +++

+++ Highly detailed graphics for top down strategy or close up action +++





Goals range from building a certain type of coaster, to keeping a visiting VIP happy.



The landscaping tools let you sculpt your park at will.



The Coaster Cam: enough to induce virtual vomiting.

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3



■ £34.99 | Pub: Atari | Dev: Frontier | ETA: Out Now |

www.atari.com/rollercoastertycoon

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card DESIRES PIV 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB graphics card

Wizard of the coaster Steve O'Hagan cleans up the sick

MANKIND has a love/hate relationship with terror. On the one hand we're fighting a war against it, on the other, we seek it out – bungee jumps, Friday nights on the piss in Bridgend and rollercoasters. Combine this with a seemingly insatiable appetite for god games, simulations and *Theme Park*-a-likes, and you have *Rollercoaster Tycoon 3*.

The brainchild of designer Chris Sawyer, the first *Rollercoaster Tycoon* was 1999's biggest-selling PC title in the US. But this had less to do with an overwhelming demand for a rollercoaster maintenance simulation, more with the fact that it was a clever, addictive

and, above all, fresh management game. Five years on, do these accolades still apply?

BIG WILLY STYLE

The 'fresh' part is the problem, obviously, as the basic *Rollercoaster* formula remains unchanged. Essentially, you have to build an amusement park from scratch into the most popular recreation destination this side of Disneyland. This involves constructing rides, shops, restaurants, bars and toilets, linking them all together with paths, and then making sure it all doesn't fall apart or get buried under a pile of litter when the screaming kids arrive.

When we say 'rides', naturally the coaster is king. These are what really pull the punters, and you get to place every twist, dive and loop in the track, saving your designs for use in other games. Make it look like a willy, or spell out a rude word – you can let your imagination run free.

So what's new? Well, Mr Sawyer has stepped aside, and

in comes the man behind the classic *Elite*, David Braben, and his company Frontier. And they've brought with them a top-notch 3D engine. So now you can zoom in and watch those families squabble, gorge themselves on ice creams, and best of all, hurtle round your pride and joy – the rollercoaster.

GET US A BURGER

With a really solid, 'toy town' kind of feel, the detail is superb. The facial expressions of visitors – or 'peeps' – change from joy to

anguish when they can't locate the loos, kids cry when balloons pop, and you'll even spy young lovers sticking their tongues down each others' throats. We're also treated to flexible difficulty levels for each mission, a sandbox mode, the added headache of visiting VIPs to keep happy, as well as scenario and visitor editing tools.

It's the most polished version of the game so far, and those who've never made a small child puke before will be in store for hours of fun. But the new interface with its streamlined minimalism hides a baffling array of build options, and is not the best for the newbie. For vomit veterans, *RC3* is like a visit to Alton Towers; you know what's in store, but it doesn't stop it from being a laugh. After all, when a game this popular isn't broke, you don't fix it. **PC**

IN PERSPECTIVE

VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG

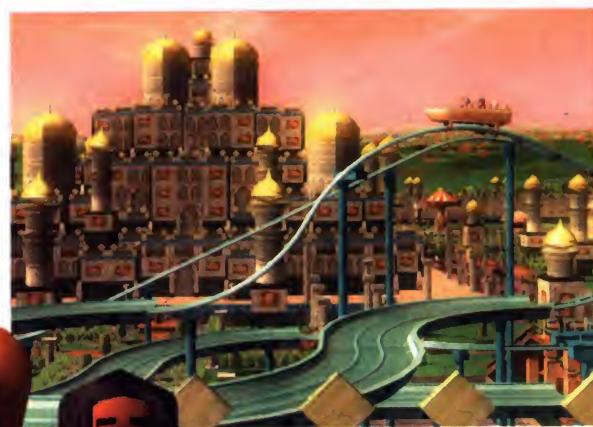
Reviewed Issue: 135, Score: 84% Something a little different in the 'Theme' world, and a lot of fun it is too. Here, you get to design not just your entertainment 'lot' but also the interior of your sprawling, tacky casinos. It's Sim sin.

ZOO TYCOON

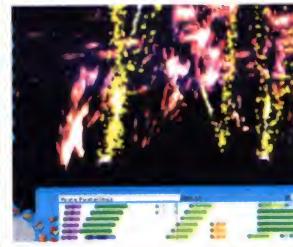
Reviewed Issue: 111, Score: 48% Take *Theme Park World*, set it in a zoo, and you have *Zoo Tycoon*. Oh, and forget to make the visuals any good, and to add any original or interesting gameplay dynamics. Mucking out the elephant house is probably more fun.



As usual, there are a variety of themes, from Western to Spooky.



That's not a rollercoaster!



Light up the sky and all that.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Superb 3D engine
- ✓ Great sandbox mode and game editors
- ✓ Tried and tested formula still works well
- ✗ No massive gameplay changes
- ✗ The interface is boggling if you're a beginner

79

Still fun to fiddle with, after all these years

CALL OF DUTY

UNITED OFFENSIVE

EXPANSION PACK

EXPANSION TO THE
WINNER OF OVER 80
GAME OF THE YEAR
AWARDS AND 50
EDITORS' CHOICE
AWARDS



13 new single-player missions,
as seen through the eyes of American,
British and Russian soldiers.



New weapons, including flamethrowers,
deployable machine guns, and the ability
to call in artillery strikes.



10 new multiplayer maps and
3 new modes, with vehicle combat
including tanks and jeeps!

EXPANSION PACK TO THE
BAFTA AWARD WINNING
2003 GAME OF THE YEAR



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ACTIVISION.

activision.com



Use chain shot to take down enemy sails.



We're going to need a bigger boat...



Rudimentary stealth elements are a low point.

SID MEIER'S PIRATES!



£34.99 | Pub: Atari | Dev: Firaxis | ETA: November 19 | www.pirates-game.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB DirectX 9.0b-compatible 3D card. DESIRES PIII 1.4GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

The third incarnation of Sid Meier's classic pirate adventure finally sets sail. Richie Shoemaker is your master and commander

ASK A VETERAN

of gaming's 'Golden Age' what his or her favourite game is and there's a very good chance, especially if their formative years were spent in the company of a Commodore 64, that they'll immediately bark out the original 1987 version of *Sid Meier's Pirates!* If you were then to retort

with the 1993 'Gold' version that was updated to run on the emergent PC format, they'll more than likely sneer, muttering something about it losing the purity of the superior, if rubbish-looking, original.

One wonders then what the old guard will make of this 2004 edition, which could justifiably be called *Pirates! Platinum*, because, as *Gold* was to the original, so this new *Sid Meier's Pirates!* is much the same game, only dressed to impress on far more capable machines. The essential question is, underneath the 21st Century graphics, does the 17th Century gameplay still hold water? The answer is a very definite "Yo-ho-ho."

The story and setting will be unnervingly familiar to anyone who's played *Pirates!* or any of the many stuffy derivatives that have appeared since. You begin,

as ever, as a young buck with salt water running through the veins and dreams of finding fame and a fortune across the bright and breezy seas of the Caribbean. And if on your travels you manage to discover the whereabouts of your extended family, who've been so cruelly abducted by the most villainous pirate afloat, all the better.

DOWN THE DOCKS

Predictably, you begin the game in port and are immediately struck by the game's jaunty simplicity, for rather than having to run around a vast 3D set of ramshackle houses, each settlement is navigated via a simple menu. Together with the jolly shanties that play out in the background, the mood is set for a fun and frivolous adventure.

Of course with a menu before you it would be rude not to

explore all the options, and so, after paying a visit to the shipwright (who'll repair and upgrade your ship) and the trader (who'll happily exchange coin for all the goods you steal), it's off to sample the local ale at the tavern. Here, rumours of passing treasure ships can be heard, extra crew hired, and later, when you've a tidy sum rattling about in your hold, you can pick up treasure maps and other assorted trinkets from the creepy guy at the back.

Prior to setting sail it's always worth popping round to the local governor's mansion, where you'll be able to obtain a Letter of Marque – official authorisation to plunder the ships of the enemy. More importantly, the governor's home is also that of

his daughter, who as governor's daughters are prone, like nothing better than to swoon when hearing about your tales of derring-do. Needless to say every port has a governor with a luscious daughter, so should you place higher priority on emotional rather than financial matters, it's quite possible to impress them all.

On leaving port the view switches to a 3D isometric map view of the Caribbean, and while the

IN PERSPECTIVE

X2: THE THREAT

Reviewed Issue 138, Score 92%
Seek fame and fortune in ships of a different kind in Egosoft's *Elite*-alike sequel. You're best off avoiding the storyline like the plague, but the rest of it is well worth a look.

PORT ROYALE 2

Reviewed Issue 147, Score 75%
If *Pirates!* appears puerile and lacks the realistic hard-edge you seek, this real-time strategy game set in a pirate-riddled Caribbean may be the one for you.



PIRATES GO TO WAR



Send out a landing party to plunder the townships.

MOUNTING A SHORE RAID IS A PLEASURE FOR TODAY'S BUCCANEERS

If there was one aspect of the original *Pirates!* that was decidedly dodgy, it was the part of the game where you attacked settlements from the land. Today, having had a ton of real-time strategy games for inspiration, Sid Meier's all-new *Pirates!* has it sorted. Now, when you send a landing party ashore to attack a village from behind, you're treated to a far more interesting view. It's nowhere near the sophistication of the *Total War* series, or even *C&C* (in fact it plays more like *North & South*, if you remember that), but the 3D view is a welcome one, with cannonballs flying and swords flashing. Needless to say, taking a heavily fortified town is probably one of the most challenging parts of the game, but offers one of the greatest rewards for victory, bringing much coinage and the ability to decide who to install as the new governor.

With great anticipation, the loot is divided among the crew. Each man willingly takes 53 ⚰ as his share. As Apprentice captain, your 5 percent share of the loot comes to 524 ⚰.

OK, sounds good.

Never mind, we'll divide later.



Unless you divvy up the coin and take a few months rest, your crew will mutiny.

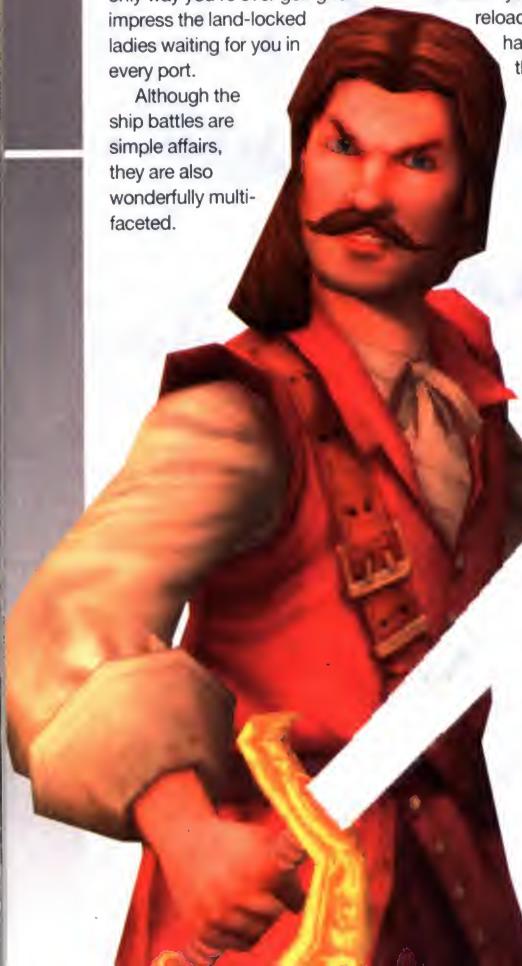
geography is generally accurate, that's pretty much where the realism ends. Controlling your ship is as easy as navigating a soap-dish in a bath. Left and right cursor keys steer while up and down change your speed from full sails to what in another

Movement is, as before, simple and arcade-like (if you remember an obscure Psygnosis game called *Overboard* you'll know what to expect), but of course in order to hit each other ships must present their widest profile to fire, and their narrowest to

"Pull off an impressive trot and she'll whisk you away and ride you like a stallion"

ship and another universe would be half-impulse power. And so, after slicing through the sea for a few seconds appreciating the comical but satisfying speed and manoeuvrability on your vessel, it's off to explore, or fight, or trade, or do whatever you want to do. Fight mostly, because it's by far the easiest and most fun way to make money and it's the only way you're ever going to impress the land-locked ladies waiting for you in every port.

Although the ship battles are simple affairs, they are also wonderfully multi-faceted.

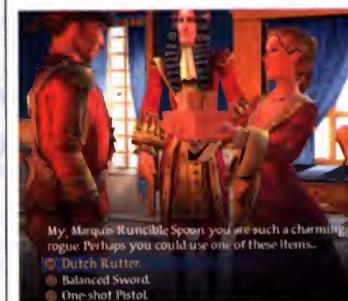


To take control of a vessel you have to defeat the captain in single combat. Making him beg like a dog is optional.

SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

SPEAK UP

WIBBLE WIBBLE, WORBLE, TWITTER



My, Marquis Runcible Spoon you are such a charming rogue. Perhaps you could use one of these items.

- Dutch Rutter
- Balanced Sword
- One-shot Pistol

Can't understand a word, love.

The bloody *Sims*. Not content with hijacking the charts for the best part of four years, they've now infiltrated *Pirates!* Or rather they've 'influenced' it, for rather than use proper voices for the speech in the game, what Firaxis have done is incorporated that inane *Sims* language where characters howl and whine without actually saying anything in any recognisable language. A bit like Welsh, now that I think about it. I'd stay out of the valleys for a while if I were you, *Richie* – Ed

the sea, each successful blow landed literally taking them one step closer to the edge of the ship. Of course the enemy is trying to sweep you away too, so by studying posture, it becomes

easy to predict his next move and prepare a fitting counter.

However, the longer you take, the more crew members are killed, and if you end up being the last man standing, combat



Ridicule is nothing for a bloodthirsty pirate to be scared of.



Advantage



You can be a skilled fencer, a charming rogue or a wily trader.



Land-ho if you want to find buried treasure.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY (O)



Real human foes could have transformed the ship combat.

WE MIGHT SOUND LIKE A BROKEN RECORD, BUT...

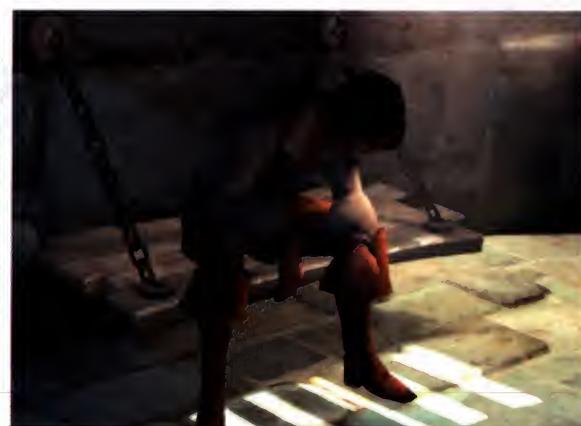
It's an obvious flaw that will no doubt be receiving some love via the inevitable add-on, but *Pirates!* is a game screaming for some multiplayer action. At the very least there should have been some kind of deathmatch or capture the flag arena, where players could control single ships in battle. It may have seemed a trivial addition to make, but it would have been a great deal of fun. As competent as the AI is, out of all the battles in the game, the ship-to-ship assaults are the easiest to win.

can become decidedly difficult. Lose the battle and a cold dark cell awaits (from which it is possible to escape, of course). Victory on the other hand brings you gold, goods and perhaps, if you haven't knackered it too badly, a brand new ship, should you wish to transfer your flag of command.

GOING DUTCH

Whatever the outcome of battle, ships need repairing, sailors need food and, after a lengthy voyage particularly, crews can become mutinous to the point where the only way to quell them is to divvy up the coin and take a break. If your crew does rebel against your cruel reign however, *Pirates!* at least gives you a chance by handing you a small percentage of the takings and a skeleton crew – in a sense dividing up the booty. While this puts you back towards the beginning of the game and could be seen as an unwarranted frustration, it actually adds to the urge to get back on your feet and prove those mutinous sea dogs wrong.

Returning to port has other benefits too. Swing by the Governor's residence and you may be in line for promotion, which is sure to impress his daughter, leading to an invitation to the ball and one of *Pirates!* more devilish games of combat – dancing. Fittingly these scenes play out much like the fencing, for as the music plays your partner offers a flick of the wrist as subtle clues as to what



If you lose a duel, it's straight to the clink.



With all that rum there had to be a pile-up sooner or later...

move to make. As the dance progresses it can be tricky to pull off a sequence of moves without stumbling and blowing your chances of getting a shag. Pull off an impressive trot however and she'll giggle with delight, heart pumping with barely concealed lust, and when the dance is over she'll whisk you to the servants' quarters and ride you like a stallion. Or at least that's what I thought would happen when after one particularly lustful waltz I was offered a 'Dutch Rutter'.

SNAKE IN THE GRASS

Pirates! is a wonderfully engaging and accessible experience. The setting is vibrant, the characters are full of humour and the gameplay is bursting with variety. The freeform play (now lazily referred to as "GTA-style") links in with each section remarkably well, and although there are areas that lack excitement and challenge, the time spent in them is so short and the game moves on to something new so quickly that *Pirates!* less than impressive features are happily overlooked.

One such dodgy gameplay section happens if you wish to enter a French port that's hostile to you (because you've been mercilessly preying on Gallic frigates). You have to sneak in, at which point the gameplay goes

all *Metal Gear* and you have to avoid the guards and sneak around the maze-like streets. Clearly the adventures of Solid Snake were the inspiration, but in reality these sojourns play more like *Pac-Man* (slowed to a crawl and without the pills) and are only mildly amusing at best.

However, this brief dip into mediocrity aside, *Pirates!* is a game that's difficult to resist. Like its predecessor, Sid Meier's game effortlessly takes the best of every style of gaming and mixes it into a consistent and enduringly charming whole. Certainly there are games with more strategy, and others with more action, but few, if any, can claim to be as breathlessly easy to enjoy. Little wonder that underneath the plush graphics so little has changed in *Pirates!* – it simply didn't need to. 

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Full of variety, colour and fun
- ✓ Impressive 3D visuals and Disney-style animation
- ✓ Excellent sound and music
- ✗ Dull stealth sections
- ✗ Crying out for a multiplayer mode

88

Thar be gold!



The original Larry Laffer is to be found in a backstreet bar.



Ah, the old wet T-shirt contest.

LEISURE SUIT LARRY MAGNA CUM LAUDE

£29.99 | Pub: Vivendi Universal | Dev: High Voltage | ETA: Out Now | www.leisuresuitlarry.com

REQUIRES PIII 800, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card. DESIRES P4 2.5GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Steve Hill goes back to college, with considerably worse results

OLD GAMES don't die; they just get a next-generation makeover. They don't cum much older than *Leisure Suit Larry*, the franchise that the majority of seasoned gamers hoped had been consigned to the annals of history. With its genesis in 1981's text-based *Soft Porn Adventure*, the polyester-clad would-be lothario made his full debut in 1987's *In The Land Of The Lounge Lizards*,

spawning a further half dozen spurious instalments, with a final barrel-scraping compilation disgracing the shelves as recently as 1999.

So what is Larry doing back, and how come he's at college? Fear not, this is a different Larry, one Mr Lovage no less, nephew of the original Larry Laffer. Having just started at Community College, Larry Junior has only one thing on his mind (and it's not getting a trench coat or joining a real ale society). Scientifically a dwarf, and lumbered with an outsized head and distinctive taste in leisurewear, poor Larry doesn't have much luck with the ladies.

Like uncle, like nephew then, but thankfully this is where the similarities end. A world away from the laborious point 'n' click adventures of yore, while there are nods to the (thankfully)

defunct genre, there is no need to combine a spatchcock with musk of elderberry in order to make progress. Furthermore, *Magna Cum Laude* will never ask you to choose from a list of glib responses while being forced to listen to some nominally branching conversation.

It's all about the chat-up lines, and conversations are still commonplace, but are conducted through the medium of guiding a solitary sperm through a series of moving symbols. Hit too many reds and the chat will begin to wane; consistently find green and your chosen filly will fall under your charms. The system works surprisingly well, and with enough manual dexterity you can talk your intended mate into performing unspeakable acts of sexual depravity. That's the theory anyway, although Larry



Not much to shout about there.

IN PERSPECTIVE

LEISURE SUIT LARRY:

LOVE FOR SAIL

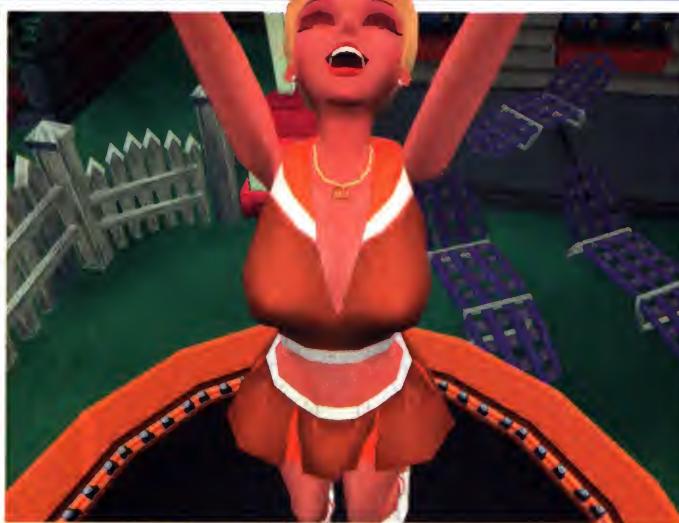
Reviewed Issue 46, Score 79%

See how Uncle Larry wooed the ladies in the olden days with this snapshot of his life.

SINGLES: FLIRT UP YOUR LIFE

Reviewed Issue 142, Score 42%

A different type of game, but with a similar goal, this is essentially a pornographic version of *The Sims*.



"Scientifically a dwarf and with an outsized head, poor Larry doesn't have much luck with the ladies"

being Larry, he is inevitably foiled at the last minute.

CARRY ON CAMPUS

In many ways, *Magna Cum Laude* is more of an RPG than an adventure, with a variety of quests (women) available to attempt at your leisure, and numerous objects to acquire, including a variety of absurd costumes. Gameplay-wise though, it's really little more than a series of mini-games, with slightly lewder versions of classics such as *Pong* and *Tapper* augmented with a selection of rhythm-action tasks.

The plot, such as it is, involves the TV dating show 'Swingles' coming to town, with Larry guaranteed

entry providing he can acquire a certain number of tokens of affection from the girls on campus. This is essentially a licence to roam, and Larry has his pick of the ladies, encompassing such diverse characters as a nerdy library-dweller, a psychotic cheerleader, a Russian spy and a Mafioso's daughter.

Predictably, all manner of sexual high-jinks entail, and the game does have an 18 certificate, with the American censor warning that it contains 'mature humor, nudity, strong language, strong sexual content, use of alcohol'. We're not sure if that's in any descending order of unholliness, but we can confirm that all

are present and correct (and not just on a PC ZONE night out). The game also has surprisingly high-production values for what is superficially a piece of tat, even boasting licensed music including such pertinent tracks as Right Said Fred's *I'm Too Sexy*, and Motley Crue's *Girls Girls Girls*.

WEEKENDER

Naturally, we have been sceptical of the project ever since we heard of it. However, having racked up over ten hours' play in the space of a weekend, we have to admit to being pleasantly surprised, with a cynical frown gradually lifting to be replaced by mild bemusement, and even the



The Porn Fairy, naturally.



Larry knocks one out. Lovely.

TOO DRUNK TO F**K

NOBODY HAS EVER PULLED WHEN SOBER, BUT IT MIGHT JUST WORK

Being Larry is one of the few times that you don't want to be too drunk. Like in reality it makes everything difficult, be it tossing a quarter into a glass, or guiding a spermatozoa between a series of hazards. Sobering up before attempting a key sequence is advisable, and this can either be done by guzzling coffee, drinking so much that you embark on a streak and wake up in your own mess, or – least logically – by taking a piss. Anywhere will do.



Larry syphons the python.

occasional begrudging snort of stifled laughter.

Of course it's largely inane, and hardly the zenith of hardcore gaming, but there's something that keeps you ambling round the campus and boasting on the women, if only to see what happens. It's the same mentality that had a generation of junior masturbators glued to Channel Four's Red Triangle season of late-night art films, prying their eyes open in the hope of seeing a bit of moff. And for those who recall a German dancer squatting over a remote-controlled tank bearing a dildo, it was worth every minute. Such explicit action is unlikely to befall Larry, but you get to the stage where you actively want him to get laid, not necessarily for any voyeuristic thrills,

but just to get it over with for his sake.

It would be an extremely unfussy onanist that turned to *Leisure Suit Larry* for any kind of sexual stimulation – although the loading screens do feature real semi-naked women – but that's not really the point. Essentially a pornographic playground, it's proof that games don't necessarily have to be about sport, war or goblins. 

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Passes the time
- ✓ Occasionally amusing
- ✗ Embarrassing if you get caught playing it
- ✗ Sometimes feels like a chore

65

Perversely playable



Guide your sperm accurately and you score.



"And Banzai! to you as well, good sir..."

MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT



■ £34.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: EA | ETA: Nov 19 | www.eagames.com

REQUIRES P4 1.5GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card **DESIRE** P4 3GHz, 1GB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Will Porter fights them on the beaches, in the jungles and in more jungles. And lives

"I'VE BEEN here before you know. The beach, and... And... The shooting. The dead people, I remember them. That pier wasn't there last time though, and the graphics are certainly better. Yes, yes, it's all coming back to me now. I was here before about three years ago when I was playing *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*, and now I'm doing exactly the same thing although it isn't half as good. Right-ho. Darling, did

you see where I put my receipt?" What an opener! What a first level! What a hook for the rest of the game! I'm being sarcastic of course; it's actually rubbish. The sad thing is that, deep down, *Pacific Assault* is in part a nice game with some lovely levels, shiny graphics and an only slightly wonky physics engine. When it's doing its own thing,

using a concept known in some areas as 'being original', then it's an engaging shooter that may not turn the world upside down, but has some nice ideas and constructs a fair few memorable set-pieces.

The thing is, it just seems so obsessed with reclaiming former *Allied Assault* glories and replicating (and then over-

playing) what made *Call Of Duty* so wonderful, that it buries itself under the mantra of 'More jeep chases! More standing guns! We'll pull all the same tricks they did, but we'll do them more often and we'll do them better!'

Only, *MoH: PA* never actually does them better, and it compounds this by swapping the grit, grime and stomach-



One of many gigantic, big guns



Some of Pacific's scripted

chewing terror conveyed in Dawnville or Stalingrad for tamer Boy's Own adventure tangent.

DON'T I KNOW YOU?

You see, in far too many places, *Pacific Assault* feels like yet another rehash of the same WWII game: re-copied and xeroxed into fuzziness and mediocrity. This (most stupidly) shows up the most in the earlier levels – the part of the game that should have been designed to grab you and not let go. After the perfunctory standing behind



Icons above your squads tell you what they're up to.



Bring back the Nazis. That's what I reckon.

IN PERSPECTIVE

CONFLICT: VIETNAM

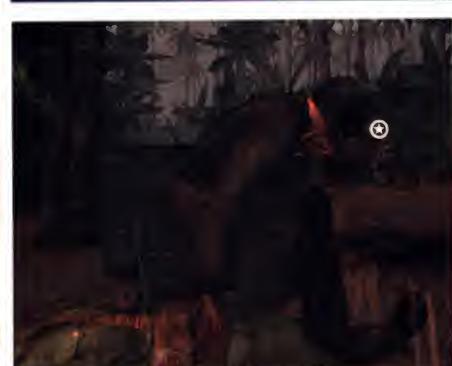
Reviewed Issue 146, Score 75%
At times, the third *Conflict* game feels entirely similar to *Pacific Assault*, although its squad system is miles more cumbersome and the game is a tad duller.

CALL OF DUTY

Reviewed Issue 136, Score 94%
As I'm sure I mention once or twice in the review, *Call Of Duty* is infinitely better than *Pacific Assault* in every single, solitary conceivable way.



you get to play with.



The medic pukes almost constantly.



Secret Weapons Over Guam, anyone?



sequences are mind-blowing.

military beach furniture and hiding under piers in the first level, you get knocked unconscious and are whisked (well, not exactly whisked, the load-times are hideous) back in time to a boot camp level. Here, you're shouted at by a drill sergeant who's hell-bent on teaching you exactly what you've already done in the first level in the most drawn-out and stereotypical way imaginable.

I swear, this game has got more introductions than *The Return Of The King* had endings. Even after this, you've still got the delights of more load-screens, some patriotic FMV and an endless jeep ride around Pearl Harbour with some divot in a captain's hat to endure before you're allowed to have any fun. The assault on Pearl itself is a blast, but following this, the game takes an extremely long time to capitalise and present you with something that's actually new and improved.

LUCKY SEVEN

In fact, *Pacific Assault* continues to stutter until it hits its stride a good seven levels into the Pacific campaign, by which point you're



Here he is! Tommy Conlin, your good self.



deep in the jungle in the excellent Guadalcanal missions and fully accustomed to the eccentricities of your squad and the way the game mechanics operate. You're stuck under the helmet of one Tommy Conlin, and accompanied in your travels by some good ol' boys by the names of Frank, Jimmy and Willy (none of whom are quite as irritating as you might imagine). With these guys in tow (and sometimes a fair few more for good measure), you find yourself infiltrating Japanese bases and listening to distant shouts and rumblings as you prepare to hold off advancing troops on Bloody Ridge. You also find yourself running over airfields as countless Zeros swarm overhead, trudging along jungle paths or waist-deep in jungle rivers and keeping your eyes on the undergrowth for the many, many ambushes that await you.

It's only here that *Pacific Assault* begins to impress a bit more on its own terms, regularly coming up with new objectives and environments that ensure that, even if you're not enraptured, you rarely get bored. Offence can be rapidly changed to defence,

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

(O)



A LITTLE BIT OF LICK AND POLISH WOULDN'T HAVE GONE AMISS

There are some lovely touches here, such as the way that bodies float downstream or the way your eyes have to focus when you look through your binoculars. However, the fact remains that *Pacific Assault* is a very untidy game, and one that'll probably be needing some fairly hefty patching when it gets released. Whether in misplaced trigger points, iffy body physics or even in nearby pedestrians holding imaginary guns when you smack them with the butt of your rifle in the training mission, you can't help but feel that the rush for a Christmas release may have been a factor during development.



Find Ben Affleck. And kill him.



What do you mean, "he's behind you?"

quiet jungle paths can suddenly sprout shitloads (and I mean shitloads, this is a game that favours quantity of enemy over quality) of 'Banzai!'-ing enemies, and tables are often turned just when you're least expecting it. Here, in the jungle with lots of villages to snipe and fleeing soldiers to lead you into ambushes, there's plenty to enjoy even if the action regularly sways the wrong side of mindless.

DAMN STRAIGHT

One thing that *Pacific Assault* absolutely nails, meanwhile, is its healing system. Despite his bizarre predilection towards puking his guts up about four times a level (towards the start of the game at least), the usage of Jimmy the medic is inspired. If you're wounded, a brief tap of the keyboard informs him that you need assistance, and he then patches you up as soon as he can (or when he's magically recovered from his own bullet wounds). This lessens the need for obsessive-compulsive quicksaving considerably, especially because when you're shot to pieces, as Jimmy can reach you to bring you back to the land of the living while you stare up at the sky through the mists of semi-unconsciousness. That is, apart from when you're wondering where he's got to, and instead discover an angry Asian man jabbing your face with a bayonet.

YOU, SOLDIER!

Squad control too is quite fun: you have limited control in that, when the game judges it feasible, you can tell them to open fire, retreat, regroup or push forward – although it's true that these effectively translate to 'I know you're shooting things, please carry on', 'Where the hell are you guys going?', 'I'm getting mulled over, come over here now!' and 'Why are you back there?'. Squad mechanics are



loose, and rarely used tactically unless they relate to your own health-bar, but they still add an extra level to an otherwise linear experience.

That said, while *Call Of Duty* generally kept you with your allies (because being behind a wall with them meant you were alive and going anywhere else meant you were dead), here it's too easy to find yourself fighting far in front of your homeboys, simply because you don't have the patience to follow their sometimes laborious pace or misplaced battle chat.

STAND UP & FIGHT

When it isn't trying hard to impress you, *Pacific Assault* is a fun blast, but it truly lacks the sense that you're fighting in a larger scale conflict, or even that you're fighting real people. When you get 'Banzai!'-ed by multiple enemies, it feels far more like it did when fending off The Flood in *Halo* than crack Japanese troops, while your guns lack the weight and authentic crack of those of its closest rival. The AI too, is from the school of alternately standing up and sitting down in a nearby window, while the easiest way to clear out

"This isn't *Call Of Duty*, and it never gets close to instilling the same thrills or emotions"

a bunker is to shoot the guy on the mounted gun and then watch the troops take turns to waddle up to the gun and stand directly in your line of fire.

Meanwhile, the mandate of 'More! Faster! Etc' means that PA is also heavily punctuated by 'roller-coaster' moments that have you either being driven around in vehicles and doing all manner of exciting things with gigantic guns. This is fine in moderation, but by the end, you won't want to touch a gun emplacement ever again.

This is a flawed game, and it'll be even more flawed in the punter's estimation in that it simply isn't *Call Of Duty* and never gets close to instilling the same thrills or emotions. But this isn't to say that if you can get through to the meat of it, there's nothing to be enjoyed – if you look past its faults, there's variety, and you rarely get bored. For proof, look no further than the bizarre turn of events that has you piloting a plane and going on bombing runs a few levels before the game's close.



SECOND OPINION
JAMIE SEFTON

Pacific Assault isn't what we were expecting from what was once the flagship WWII shooter franchise. Granted, there are some great scripted set-pieces again – such as the hugely exciting Pearl Harbour assault – some convincing tropical jungle battles, and the excellent additions of a medic and the 'Verge of Death' device. However, the squad under your command falls between being too simplistic and not sophisticated enough – I'd rather just have a couple of AI-driven characters fighting alongside you that just die as you go along instead of being quasi-immortal as they are here. (Never go into a war with Sefton – Ed.)

Most surprisingly, there's a distinct lack of polish – you feel there's a patch or two as eager to ambush you as a legion of Japanese soldiers. *Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault* is a good game, but it's not essential.

That said, I can't give it an 'Essential' tag. Despite a few points of ingenuity that shine through the murk, there's just not enough reasons for it to be a must-have game. It's also not nearly as good as *Call Of Duty*. Did I mention that already? 



Not many brains in this beauty.



The airstrike assault is ace.



This gurning twat irritates you for ages.



The axe: underused FPS weapon number one.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Some neat skirmishes and intelligent scripting
- ✓ Excellent medic system
- ✓ Some gorgeous visual effects
- ✗ Tries too hard to impress
- ✗ Takes forever to get going
- ✗ Lacks the grit and emotion of *Call Of Duty*

79

Good in parts, bad in others

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STRANGER



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Great goal. Now get on a plane.



Time to launch it into the box, Ashley.



One freak goal and he thinks he can score from anywhere...

CLUB FOOTBALL 2005

■ £39.99 | Pub: Codemasters | Dev: Codemasters | ETA: Out Now
www.codemasters.com/clubfootball2005

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Steve Hill casts an eye over a new addition to the Premiership

WHILE the big guns of *FIFA* and *Pro Evolution Soccer* kicked lumps out of each other last season, Codemasters drifted in at the far post with a shrewdly targeted effort. The original *Club Football* did decent business on the consoles, and this term sees it limber up for its debut on the PC as the increasingly bloody battle for the football punter's wallet escalates.

The concept is simple: bespoke versions of the game are released based around individual clubs, covering content, packaging, and the intro. So while the title sequence of the Manchester United version shows a bunch of pie-eaters lurking outside 'Lou Macari's Chippy,' the Arsenal game has the Highbury faithful cheerfully chatting on their mobiles. And although we haven't seen the Liverpool version, we imagine it features sour-faced urchins offering to 'mind your car' for a quid.

We mention these three teams as they are the only English representatives on the PC, whereas the consoles are host to a slew of clubs extending to such mid-table fare as Birmingham City. It's a cautious approach, with the big three (Chelsea fans may disagree)

supplemented by Real Madrid, Bayern Munich, Borussia Dortmund, Ajax and Marseille.

SHAOLIN SOCCER

Either way, each game enables you to take charge of one of some 250 teams for friendlies, with a Super League and a Domestic league played out with

your club of choice. On the pitch it's a largely arcade approach, with little concession given to the laws of gravity and physics. It's generally end-to-end stuff, with the ball pinged about at pace and keepers making supernatural saves. Goal feasts are possible though, and there is almost always time to create one

last chance. It may not have the finesse of *Pro Evo* or the slickness of *FIFA*, but instant thrills are the order of the day.

You'd have to be a bit weird to buy a version if you weren't a supporter of that particular club, but for genuine fans there are plenty of extras, such as unlockable videos of memorable goals. There are also scenarios to play out, although historic matches are perversely played using this year's squads. And in an extreme example of sloppiness, the Arsenal version

sees the Gunners take on Man U in the final minutes of the 2001 Cup Final, which was of course played against Liverpool.

Despite such howlers, there are some good ideas here – such as latest scores being flashed up during your league games – as well as gimmicks such as create-a-player and even create-a-club. Ultimately though, it's a largely unpolished affair that will only appeal to fans of the clubs featured. And with no Chester City version in the pipeline, this reviewer is not interested. 



No sign of a pig's head being thrown at Figo.

IN PERSPECTIVE

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4

Reviewed Issue 149, Score 89%
In the world of pretend association football, this is still the best a man can get, despite not being online.

FIFA 2005

Reviewed Issue 147, Score 60%
They've been doing this a while now, you'd think they'd get it right.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Responsive action
- ✓ Reasonable likenesses
- ✓ Extensive extras
- ✓ Decent tunes
- ✗ Limited in appeal
- ✗ Erratic
- ✗ Contains errors

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Club-footed



You have to cause damage to earn nitro, turning every race into a rolling demolition derby.

FLATOUT

■ £34.99 | Pub: Empire Interactive | Dev: Bugbear
| ETA: Out Now | www.flatoutgame.com

REQUIRES P4 1.5GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card
DESIRABLES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Anthony Holden has a smashing time with this slightly disturbing new racer

THEY'VE taken their sweet time about it, but games developers are finally waking up to the potential of physics engines in games. All the most exciting games of the moment – *Half-Life 2* on PC, *Burnout 3* and *Psi-Ops* on console – are those that apply physics in interesting ways, creating worlds full of exaggerated kinesis and explosive cause-and-effect. *FlatOut* is about to join those ranks, perhaps not with the same bang as a *Half-Life 2*, but with a definite and satisfying crunch of twisted metal.

Based loosely on the world of amateur stock-car racing, *FlatOut* is a straightforward racer

with the one advantage of having fantastic physics. The damage model is among the best in the business, enabling your car to twist, warp, smash and disintegrate in magnificent fashion. Bonnets crumple and fly off, wheels distort, exhaust systems drag on the ground. And in a hilarious (if slightly disturbing) twist, your driver even gets hurled through the windshield onto the road given enough encouragement.

What's more, every object in the environment is imbued with advanced physics properties, from fences and tyre barriers, right through to buildings and heavy machinery. Not only is this a great thing from the perspective of immersion, it transforms the racetrack from a strip of dirt and tarmac into a chaotic physical battlefield. By the end of an average race, the track looks like a hurricane has gone through.

There are no prizes for avoiding the damage either – in fact, you're positively encouraged to cause carnage.



There goes your insurance premium.



Off. Right up the tailpipe.



180... Broken bones.



Watch out for splinters.



Wheeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee! Splat.

For starters, you get a cash bonus for all the stuff you smash in a race, but the control system is also based largely around the concept of smashing. Every time you inflict damage on other cars or the environment, you earn a small amount of nitro boost, often essential to winning a race.

It makes for an interesting dynamic – rather than trying to perfect your racing skills, you have to strike a balance between keeping your car intact and crashing as much as possible (while avoiding things that really bugger you up, like trees).

CRASH AND BURN

Certainly, all this is great fun. The problem is there's not much else to the game. The tracks display a desperate lack of variety, and beyond the fun of smashing and crashing, the game is remarkably slight. There's no story, no cutscenes, no voices and very little

in the way of character. There are some amusing bonus games such as destruction derbies and a variety of sick events involving throwing your driver through the window at a target, but even these only have novelty appeal.

The only real reward system is based around buying upgrades for your car with race earnings, but this is largely unsatisfying. And to further encourage you to stop playing, the races are extremely unforgiving once you get past the early stages.

It's a shame, because the action can be hugely entertaining, but without a satisfying structure to hold it all together, *FlatOut* is at best a fun diversion. **PC**



Defensive driving is for pussies.



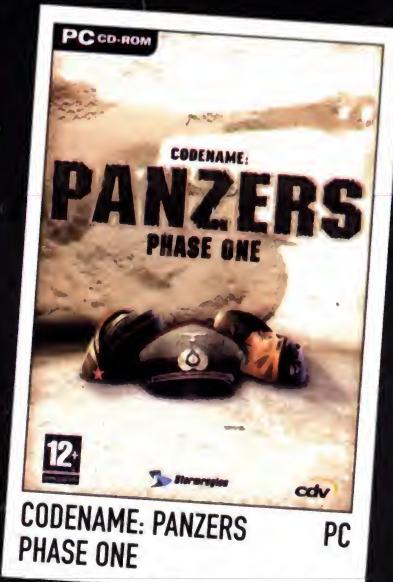
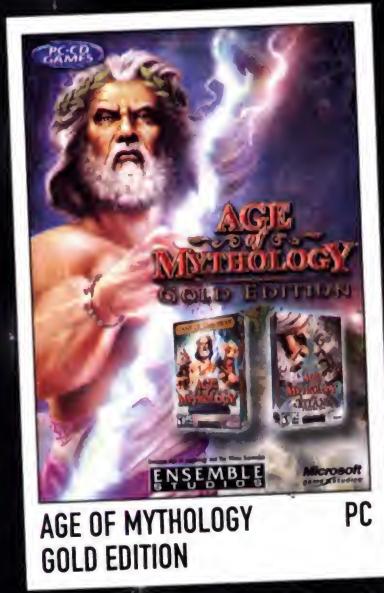
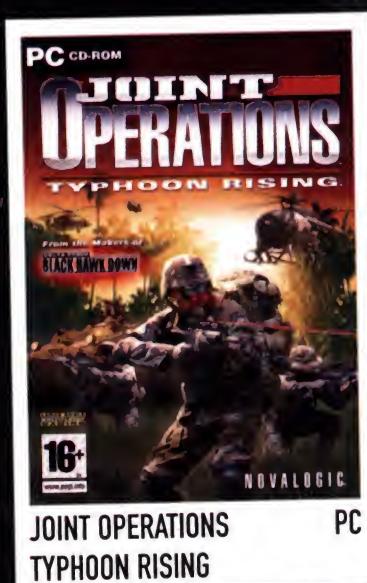
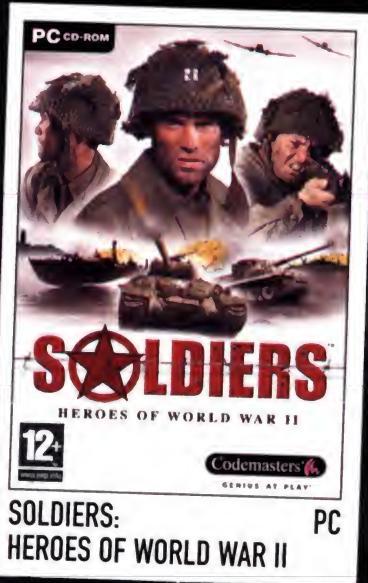
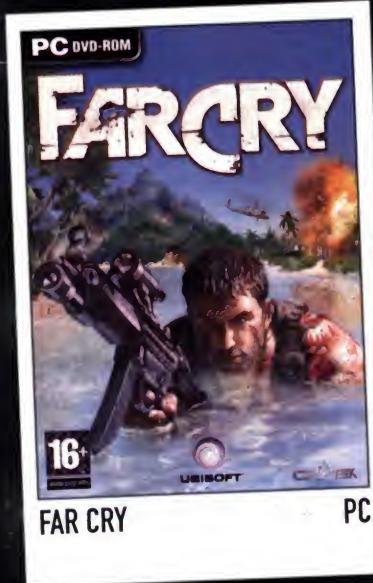
PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Excellent physics model
- ✓ Insane carnage
- ✓ Some sick touches
- ✗ Little incentive to progress
- ✗ The novelty soon wears off

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Smashing good fun, for a while

Best of 2004



MEGASTORES SILENT NIGHTS

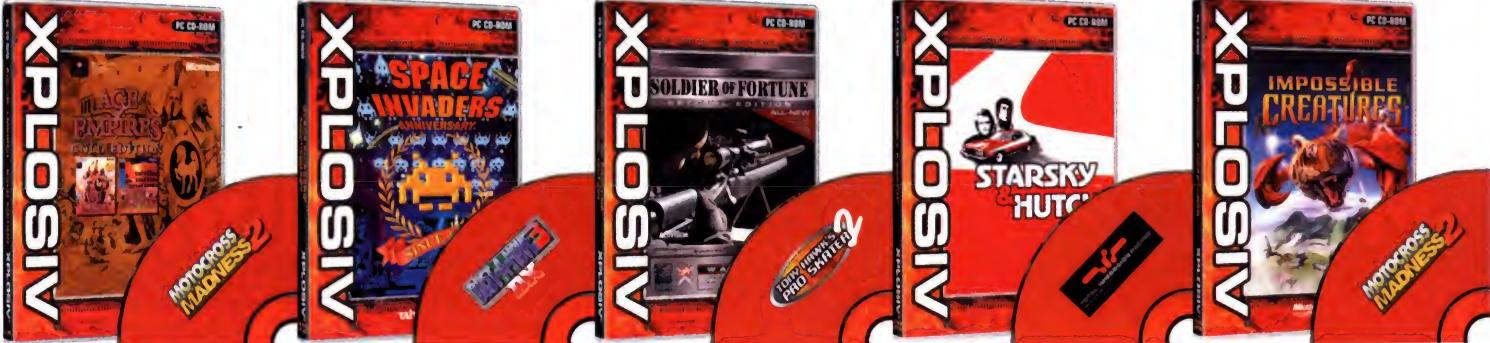
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"Blast, I just finished painting that wing."



"Hey, I can see my house from here."



Look, you really can see the whites of their eyes!

PACIFIC FIGHTERS

■ £34.99 | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: 1C: Maddox Games | ETA: Out Now | www.pacific-fighters.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D Card DESIRES P4 2.4GHz, 1GB RAM, 128MB 3D Card and a joystick

With plenty of his battles forgotten, Paul Presley finds himself all at sea

WITH THE obscurities of the Hungarian, Finnish, Danish and even Slovakian contributions to World War II nicely covered, *Pacific Fighters* gives Oleg Maddox and his team of flight sim-creating desk pilots a chance to stretch their muscles with a part of the war that's been somewhat better documented.

Not that they had much choice mind you. Aside from perhaps simulating Arthur Lowe and Clive Dunn taking to the skies of Warmington-Upon-Sea in a rickety glider built from matchsticks, there wasn't really much left in the way of WWII air combat for them to turn their attention to.

So, is this a sequel? An expansion pack? A separate

entity in its own right? Ah, Comrade Maddox, you tease us so with your category-defying antics. *Pacific Fighters* is all of those things and none.

FLYING BLIND

Here's the deal: you don't need any of the previous *IL-2* titles to run *Pacific Fighters* – it's a standalone. However, if you do add it to *IL-2: Forgotten Battles* (or the Ace Expansion Pack) it acts as an upgrade, enhancing the existing mission content, aircraft choices and engine performance like some kind of game-improving fairy godmother; but without the risk of everything turning into a pumpkin just as the final slow dance of the night kicks in.

What's on offer is pretty much everything that happened in the Pacific theatre of war, from the Pearl Harbor attack to the battles for Iwo Jima and Guadalcanal. Good taste prevents things going as far as the horrifically ultimate ending to any war displayed at Hiroshima – there are some elements of what we laughingly call real life that are simply unacceptable fodder for so-called entertainment.

Everything else you'd expect from this rigorously authentic series is present and correct, from carrier take-offs and landings to Maddox's customary inclusion of lesser highlighted aircraft such as the Japanese Vals to the US air force's A-20

bombers. All are exquisitely detailed and, even though the game engine has undergone some tweaking, it's still recognisably the *IL-2* code and it's still remarkable how good it looks after all this time.

NO ENCORES

However, there's definitely something lacking in *Pacific Fighters*, as though the box labelled 'magic sparkle' was running a bit low this time round. It's as solid, competent and thrill-packed as the previous entries in Maddox Games' single-handed assault on the flight genre, it just doesn't really do anything that we haven't seen before. Nothing major at least. Sure, we haven't been able to

land on aircraft carriers or fly Japanese aircraft in the series until now, but on a fundamental level there's nothing here that grabs you by the lapels and shakes you into submission.

It can be argued that this is little more than a stopgap, a vanity project for Maddox and his team before the substantially different *Battle Of Britain* project arrives next year. An exercise in completism if you will.

If you haven't jumped into the *IL-2* arena before, you now have two excellent entry points (this and *Forgotten Battles*). Satisfaction is guaranteed either way, but you certainly won't need both. Unless you're as into completion as Oleg Maddox appears to be. **PCZ**

IN PERSPECTIVE

IL-2: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

Reviewed Issue 128, Score 92%
Despite the score, FB isn't actually better than *Pacific Fighters*, it's more or less the same thing in a different setting. PF scores lower simply because FB exists.

SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY

Reviewed Issue 137, Score 80%
Rather more relaxed in terms of authenticity, this is action flying at its most... well, action-packed. The hardcore will hate it but at least it puts a smile on your face.



"Paaaarrp!"



"Dammit, the scary painted mouth didn't work."

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Looks as good as ever
- ✓ Authentic flight modelling
- ✓ It's still as good as *IL-2*
- ✗ The novelty's wearing off now
- ✗ Poor accessibility
- ✗ Feels strangely unpolished

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Still good, but nothing really new



There's Klingons on the starboard bow. Shake 'em off Jim, etc.



Target engines to disable enemy craft, or just blast away.



"I knew we should've turned left at Alpha Centauri."

NEXUS: THE JUPITER INCIDENT



■ £34.99 | Pub: VU Games/HD Interactive | Dev: Mithis Entertainment | ETA: Nov 5 | www.nexusthegame.com
 REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
 DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Richie Shoemaker reaches for the stars, but settles for a night in with his joystick

NEXUS: The Jupiter Incident is not what it appears to be. At a glance it looks like just another revved-up RTS spectacular, a quest for galactic domination across a galaxy ripe with familiar resources and bland alien races. However, it is in fact a lot more like a long-lost soulmate to the genre-defining

Homeworld, with all the depth and tactical subtlety that entails. While it offers up plenty of visual excitement and follows a few familiar RTS guidelines, the structure and pace of the game has much more the feel of a captain's chair simulation of fleet combat. And what's more, it's very, very good.

The story, set exclusively in space, has you playing accidental war hero Marcus Cromwell, son of the equally famous leader of the ill-fated Noah's Ark expedition of the 21st century (come on, surely you remember?). Now in the year 2111, Cromwell Jr is in the employ of one the game's rather

nefarious pan-galactic mega corporations, and is sent to investigate some strange goings-on around Jupiter way. The planet's big red eye and nearby monolith aside, it appears something wonderful might happen – and for the sake of gameplay it does, as aliens turn up causing all sorts of mischief in those sleek bi-metallic lilac spacecraft that aliens always seem to favour.

WOO-HOO, WE GOT 'EM
 Although the story underpinning the game reveals the fate of Papa Cromwell and the hubris of

human self-preservation and expansionism (ahem, sorry, wrong meeting), the gameplay itself is entirely motivated by battles. The promise of a handful of ships facing off across the heavens may appear small fry in comparison to *Homeworld*'s hundreds, but combat in *Nexus* is far more tactical and involving than the usual drag-and-drop behaviour demanded in most strategy face-offs.

You see, it's all about getting your ships into the right positions to use short, medium or long-range weapons, and of course, to know when to hold

IN PERSPECTIVE

EVE ONLINE

Reviewed Issue 130, Score 88%
 If *Nexus* is a kind of *FreeSpace/Wing Commander* played with big ships and mouse control, this is the same type of thing only based on *Elite* and set in a persistent online universe.

STAR TREK: BRIDGE COMMANDER

Reviewed Issue 114, Score 83%
 More tactical spaceship battles, only this one is played from the view of the captain's chair rather than exclusively outside the ship. One of the better *Star Trek* space sims, but hard to find.



Nexus comes with a 'Rough Guide to the Solar System'. Handy.



Of all the places to uncloak...



back in order to undertake repairs or redistribute power and resources. Whereas in most RTS titles you always have the raw materials to build new units should you lose any, here the loss of a ship is a serious blow, sometimes catastrophic.

Likewise, when the guns of a single enemy vessel fall silent and it drifts bereft of power in the depths of space you almost want to punch the air in celebration. You can't, obviously, since your bridge crew will think of you as unprofessional, but you want to nonetheless.

STAY ON TARGET

Nexus is not a hectic game by any means. Like the archetypal grizzled ship's captain you need to be aware of the space around you and the position, speed and angle of attack of the enemy. Timing is important too; you need to know when to unleash raw firepower as opposed to dealing local system-specific damage. And as new weapons, crew and ships are added to your task force, the trade-off between micromanagement and the need to co-ordinate your fleet becomes a key consideration. All in all, there's no shortage of tension.

GUNS, GUNS, GUNS...

AND JUST A BIT OF SNEAKING AROUND

Despite the fact you're in command of a fleet of warships, brimming with lasers, guns and torpedoes, not every mission in *Nexus* requires you to beat the living shit out of every other spaceship you come across. In some instances you have to take a more stealthy approach by dimming your sensors and keeping out of range of enemy craft. In another instance you might find yourself in a sector of space where all appears quiet, only to find out that you've tripped an alien sensor relay by boarding that deserted space station. Needless to say, a quick exit ensues.

Mostly of course *Nexus: The Jupiter Incident* is about zapping lasers and making things go boom, but the campaign is surprisingly varied nonetheless.

While it would be unfair to tag *Nexus* a 'hardcore' space game, it's not overly easy to get to grips with. The tutorial and early missions give some guidance, but there remains a feeling that the all-important area of strategy is glossed over somewhat. The interface is a fiddly beast, with all

immersion, while arcing plasma trails linger impressively behind ships as they cut across the blackness of space. Admittedly, the spaceships do have a rather generic look to them, and it can be difficult to tell the difference between a vast battleship and a tiny frigate without referring to



"The gameplay itself is entirely motivated by battles"

manner of icons, status displays and readouts to take in (should you feel the need to). However, once you've settled into the pace of the game, the control system actually works in your favour, giving you the tools to manage your fleet's power and weapon resources, and allowing you to control the battles rather than just react to them.

Graphically the game is impressive. Asteroid fields, nebulous clouds of debris and distant planets all add to the

the side-panel, but this is a subjective niggle at best.

Sound quality is equally good, with an orchestral score that gives way to more tribal rhythms as the aliens are dragged into the game. There are suitably convincing voice-overs for the characters too, and it's very welcome to be able to play a game where the cast isn't forced to wear overwrought American accents.

Admittedly, there are some instances where the AI does a



Episode IV. It is a period of civil war...

good job of convincing you it's stupid – enemy fleets follow scripted objectives a little too rigidly, for instance. Overall however, we're rather taken with *Nexus*. Its mixture of tactics, mouse-control and combat-orientated gameplay is suitably

different from both *Homeworld* and traditional space-combat games like *Freespace*, delivering something unique and yet familiar enough to appeal to fans of either game. Which makes an old space buckaroo like me very happy indeed. 



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Looks and sounds really rather lovely
- ✓ Tactically challenging
- ✓ Refreshingly stable and well put together
- ✗ Prosaic beginnings
- ✗ AI appears overly-scripted
- ✗ Interface takes getting used to

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"You must help me. It's Attenborough, he's gone crazy."



"Do you like my bingo wings?"



"I've told you before mister, you can point but don't click. Not till I'm 18 anyway."

MYST IV REVELATION

■ £34.99 | Dev: Ubisoft Montreal | Pub: Ubisoft | ETA: Out Now | www.mystrevelation.com

REQUIRES PIII 700, 128MB RAM (256MB for Windows XP), 32MB 3D card and a DVD drive **DESIRABLES** PIII 1GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Logic-defying obscurity never bothered Paul Presley. He had a state education after all...

THE REASON the point-and-click adventure died several years ago (apart from LucasArts leaving it behind to test the credibility of its *Star Wars* franchise instead), was that people got fed up with witnessing badly-rendered cut-scenes loosely tying together a basic collection of parlour games, shoehorned into the proceedings with all the subtlety of Graham Norton at a prize cucumber judging contest.

One series refused to die though, mostly because by the time the genre hit its darkest hour it was one of the few games still managing to retain its class, style, intelligence and playability while surrounded by a sea of third-rate dross. They may only be played by housewives and geography professors, but the

Myst titles have consistently outsold most so-called 'mainstream' games, and with good reason. Put yourself in the right frame of mind and it's nearly impossible not to become captivated.

STEP BY STEP

Myst IV Revelation then. It would have been easy for the developers to have lost heart after the mistakes surrounding *URU Live*, and it's to Ubisoft's credit that it charged a new team with the task of continuing the story of 'linking books', mysterious worlds and a family of scientific explorers torn apart by inner strife. The end result is one of the most polished games I've come across in a long time.

OK, we're not talking about the true 3D that *URU* managed,

but whatever reservations I had about this return to the 'QuickTime VR'-style environment vanished the first time I tapped the hand icon on different parts of the scenery and heard different noises. And then touched a pool of water in a bucket and saw ripples react exactly based on where the icon touched them. And when I noticed that the light levels in different locations were rising and falling due to the moving clouds in the sky covering the sun. And how your view would subtly shift its focus depending on whether your hand pointer was hovering over something in the fore- or background. It's all in the details and it's precisely why *Myst IV* keeps you coming back.

But what of the game? Just as good. At no point do the



Stonehenge's secret origins revealed.

puzzles seem forced or contrived, just intelligent and challenging. The story is told at a perfect pace, and even if you're not familiar with Atrus, his traitorous sons and their imprisonment and subsequent attempts at escape, you'll soon pick it up and find yourself completely hooked.

It is a resource hog, let's make no bones about it. Any game that comes on two DVDs and requires 6GB of disk space isn't exactly appealing to everyone. But if you can find a way to accommodate the game, not just on your HD but in your hardened gaming soul, you'll find plenty to reward you. **PC**

IN PERSPECTIVE

URU: AGES BEYOND MYST

Reviewed Issue 138, Score 71%
The online masterpiece that never was. *URU Live* was canned before its time but the single-player game is still worth a look. Differs from *Myst IV* by being in true 3D.

AURA: FATE OF AGES

Reviewed Issue 148, Score 47%
Or how not to do a point 'n' click. Puzzles on the wrong side of obscure, acting that would shame a primary school nativity play and no sense of personal conviction.



A typical butchers following a visit from Korda.



By *Myst* standards, this is a simple puzzle.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Visually stunning
- ✓ Superb interface design
- ✓ Captivating story
- ✓ Sensible puzzle structure
- ✗ Super computers only
- ✗ Not true 3D

85

Adventuring done right



You can give instructions to Allied forces to co-ordinate operations, which is a nice touch.

AXIS & ALLIES

£29.99 | Pub: Atari | Dev: Timegate Studios |
ETA: Out Now | www.atari.com/axisandallies/

REQUIRES PIII 1.5GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

DESIRABLE P4 2GHz, 384MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

A WWII RTS inspired by a board game?
Steve O'Hagan is our bored gamer

AXIS & ALLIES

started life as a *Risk*-style board game that enabled you to re-enact WWII on a global scale. It involved plastic tanks, ships and soldiers, and a huge amount of dice. It was repetitious, though fun. So is this computerised version, minus much of the 'fun' part.

Part of the problem is that instead of playing to the original game's strengths, what the developer has devised is a lily-livered RTS that's a pale shade of the *Kohan* engine on which it's based. You can play a campaign, which is basically a

string of tenuously linked missions, or fight over the world map, à la the board game.

BORDER SQUABBLES

The RTS battles are fought over dull, isometric maps. You can zoom in a little, though apart from the odd detail like trees crushed under tank tracks, there's not much to look at. The base building and resource gathering system is fairly interesting, revolving around constructing HQs that produce and manage your armies, and depots that expand your terrain and generate cash, oil, supplies and ammo. An ever-expanding border shows the limit of your power, and within this area, troops can be re-supplied and new constructions built.

Units are grouped into regiments, each with six or so troops, trucks or tanks. The only naval units available are battleships – which are little more than floating HQs, and aircraft are called in one at a time to either bomb or scout. Trouble is, when the fighting starts, tedious drag-and-drop mass assault tactics and creeping defence building ensues, and once again an RTS betrays its genre, featuring very little in the

IN PERSPECTIVE

RISE OF NATIONS: THRONES AND PATRIOTS

Reviewed Issue 143, Score 89%
There are many similarities between these two games, even down to the 'conquer the world' mode. But *RoN* is the far more polished and playable package, and means you can be Napoleon, Alexander and Reagan (huh?), as well as Hitler.

SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII

Reviewed Issue 144, Score 90%
If you want to recreate that feeling of playing with plastic soldiers, this small-scale action/strategy hybrid is where to go. Tricky at times, but full of frenetic Fritz-bashing mayhem.



Capture towns to increase your income. What a novel concept.

way of the eponymous strategy.

Engineers can build bunkers, airborne units can make paratroops, and you can use special powers at the crucial point in the battle. But these are khaki-clad drops in an ocean of military mediocrity. For the most part, you're sat watching a massive clump of your chaps duking it out with a massive clump of the enemy's chaps.

So can you at least play the original board game in the turn-based global strategic mode? No. It's been completely paired

down to be little more than an excuse to jump from one real-time battle to another. You can only attack one occupied territory per turn, and there's no air or naval combat. Horribly dull.

If you didn't have any interest in the *Axis & Allies* brand in the first place, then never mind and turn the page. And if you're an old fan looking for some nostalgia value, you're better off calling some mates, buying some dice and dusting off that dog-eared old board game. **WZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Good presentation
- ✓ Some decent ideas
- ✗ Terribly dated and dull RTS engine
- ✗ Even worse strategic game
- ✗ Manages to be worse than a 15-year-old board game

41

The war's over
before it's begun



The night battles are, well, dark.



You can't even play the original board game. That's poor.

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CHRIS SAWYER'S LOCOMOTION

■ £19.99 | Pub: Atari | Dev: Chris Sawyer | ETA: Out now

REQUIRES PII 500MHz, 128MB RAM, DirectX9.0-compatible 8MB 3D card
DESIRE PII 700MHz, 256MB RAM, DirectX9.0-compatible 16MB 3D card

Choo-choo! Richie Shoemaker climbs aboard the latest Sawyer departure...

HAVING SOLD over seven million boxes stamped with the words *RollerCoaster Tycoon*, Chris Sawyer is one of the most successful names in gaming. What's more, apart from hiring the odd graphical artist or musician, he still prefers to work in solitude.

Locomotion is his latest effort, one that's taken two years to complete, and it's a game that bears an uncanny resemblance to Sawyer's own pre-*RollerCoaster* classic *Transport Tycoon*.

The aim, if not already evident, is to rake in obscene amounts of cash by constructing and maintaining roads, railways and airports and ensuring that people, raw materials and goods

are kept chugging along through 40-odd scenarios contained within a century of Earth history.

Graphically, it looks dated. Yes, it has the same look and an identical user interface to that from *RollerCoaster Tycoon*, but here the colours appear drab, the maps flatter and some of the tiles don't appear to connect all that well, making some parts of the map look like an Escher illusion. The gameplay is similarly pre-millennial, it being in large parts identical to *TT Deluxe* (no bad thing), but the sense of *déjà vu* is more unnerving than evocative.

Once you have a thriving network running smoothly, there's a great deal of satisfaction to be had,



Locomotion: If this doesn't appeal, we recommend Kylie's version.

particularly because the maps are so big that the challenge is often in getting your disparate means of transports working as a cohesive whole. If

that sounds like fun, go ahead, but for Sawyer's newer *Tycoon* fans, be warned: *Locomotion* is more *Railroad* than *RollerCoaster*.

PCZONE VERDICT

50

Chuffy

CAMGOO

■ £19.99, £39.99 with webcam | Pub: Emission UK | Dev: bhv Software | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 800, 128 MB RAM and a 32MB 3D Card **DESIRE** Anything higher than that

Will Porter finds out that the PC can't do it too. With Camgo

IN THE BIG list of things that are inadvisable to do in a new workplace (alongside sitting on your boss's knee and stroking his hair when drunk, or surfing for porn during your lunch hour), rule #6 states that you should never, in any circumstance, stand in the middle of the room, doing windmills with your arms,

fending off imaginary pirates. So it was then that I reviewed *Camgo* and felt a bit silly – not being helped much by the fact that the game was a bit rubbish. It's basically *Eye Toy* through your webcam, but whereas its PS2 partner is slick, cool and beautifully animated, *Camgo* is packed with needless hold-ups

and often remains quite oblivious to the fact that you've swatted a plane – even when you've poked it straight in the landing gear.

There's fun to be had here – playing virtual keepy-uppy, defending King Kong and knocking pirates away from treasure provoked giggles and mirth for one and all (although



Farckin' pirates try to steal Suzy's farckin' treasure.

mostly 'all'). But even without the animations that you're forced to

sit through and the rough edges, this is a limited package that you'll tire of even before your arms start hurting.

If I'd never stood in front of my mate's TV after closing time waving around a broom in the manner of Darth Maul, then this could have scored higher. As it is, *Camgo* becomes so pale in comparison to *Eye Toy* that it becomes virtually transparent. If you're interested in the title, for the first and last time in PC ZONE history, I recommend the PlayStation 2.



Wave your hands in the air 'cos you just don't care. Like Will.



QPR scouts – sign up this man!

PCZONE VERDICT

45

Cam-poo

MEDIEVAL LORDS: BUILD, DEFEND, EXPAND

£29.99 | Pub: Digital Jesters | Dev: Monte Cristo | ETA: October 29

REQUIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card DESIRES P4 1.4GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Build them a hovel and they will come. Steve O'Hagan is your village idiot

SIM CITY in the grimy, squalid Dark Ages is the best way to describe *Medieval Lords* – Sim Shitty City, if you like. From humble beginnings with a poxy bunch of shacks, you build up your shanty town into a medieval metropolis, stealing and conquering land from neighbouring settlements in the name of self-defence as you go.

The formula is familiar. First, build the structures necessary for people's housing, food, comfort, health, and security. Second, link them all up with roads. Third, watch the peasants flock. All this takes place under the glare of a fully 3D engine that lets you get right down and dirty at eye level, admiring your grandiose government buildings, despairing at the ill-educated plebeians spoiling the view.

Watch the hangman go about his business, or witness some toothless crane tending to her diseased swine. You half expect that bloke off *Blackadder* to appear, whining about the living conditions.

Buttressing your burg against attack takes priority. Soldiers need training, walls and towers building. But this is no RTS, more a *Theme Park* style affair, with combat feeling more like a ritual than a matter of strategy. What happens is that someone declares they are going to attack, then a timer ticks down before battle is joined. Meanwhile, each side sends its cannon fodder to where the scrap will take place.

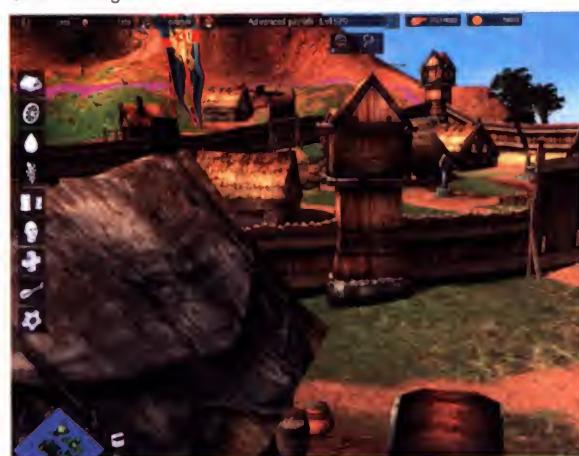
Not exactly a selling point, but it's not too much of an issue as the feudal town planning is

the meat of the game, and a tasty shank it is too. Nothing much new other than the setting, but a worthy spin-off in the Sim/Theme genre.

PCZONE VERDICT

75

A peasant experience



Build up mighty stone ramparts to protect your precious town.

ATHENS 2004

£29.99 | Pub: Eidos | Dev: Eurocom | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
DESIRES P4 2.4GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Running, jumping, swimming... Paul Presley's morning commute just gets trickier and trickier

AH, THE 2004

Olympics! What memories! What thrills! Kelly Whasserverface winning those medallions for running fractionally faster than some other women. That rowing bloke crying. The daily drug scandals. The unforgettable antics of those lovable mascots Flob and Jizz (or whatever they were called). Yes Athens 2004 was certainly the most successful Olympic event ever held since the last one.

Now, you or I may have thought that it would have made sense to release this cut-down version of the console non-hit while the actual drug-addled freaks of nature were still sunning themselves in Greece. More fool us. Obviously the head honchos at Eidos have identified that Olympic fever is at its highest some three months after the torch has burnt its last and when the new football season is well under way. Why, you can't move down at your local sports



All the thrills of watching it on the couch.



centre for all the kids practising their Greco-Roman wrestling.

It may not have been so bad if this virtual interpretation was actually any good. While the number of events on offer is more than you'd usually expect, it's still significantly less than was offered to the console kids. Worse still, the events that did show some sense of originality for the genre – Equestrian, Rhythmic

Gymnastics, Diving – have all been omitted.

Overall, *Athens 2004* is woeful in design, execution and, above all, timing. And as that bloke who landed groin-first on his vaulting pole will tell you, that's a deadly combination.

PCZONE VERDICT

20

Torch it!

TOP SPIN

■ £29.99 | Pub: Atari | Dev: PAM Development | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card DESIRES P4 1.4GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Steve Hill gets a sweat on

IT'S TENNIS. Deal with it." Not the most detailed of commissions from Jamie 'Angry' Sefton, but you can see where he's coming from. Tennis games on the PC rarely raise more than a shrug, and the only one of any note in recent years, *Virtua Tennis*, was a conversion of a Dreamcast title. That trend continues with *Top Spin*, which finds its way on to the PC a year after it debuted on Xbox.

Whereas *Virtua Tennis* scored through its simplicity, *Top Spin* requires a degree of both mental and manual dexterity, employing no less than six different buttons for various types of shot. Whereas it's possible to get by using only the default 'safe' shot, more adventurous play does reap rewards, and it's mildly satisfying to lure your opponent to the net with a drop shot before lobbing the ball over his

sweaty head – providing you can find the right button.

With a lengthy career mode and online play available, all the ingredients are in place for a feast of bat and ball. Now *Virtua Tennis* is looking somewhat dated, there's an argument for *Top Spin* being the definitive PC tennis package. However, despite being technically proficient, it lacks the frantic fun of *Virtua*. The gameplay isn't quite as flabby as the bingo-wings of the menopausal heifers of Henman Hill, but matches can be curiously unengaging. And while it can provide a reasonable distraction for a few hours, ultimately, like Wimbledon, you're glad when it's all over.

PCZONE
VERDICT

65

New balls, please



Lleyton Hewitt and Pete Sampras are among the few stars in the game. And that Kournikova.

SHADOW OPS: RED MERCURY

■ £34.99 | Pub: Atari | Dev: Zombie | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card DESIRES P4 1.5GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

What's that? Terrorists about? Better call Martin Korda

WITH *Half-Life* 2 imminent, it's a bad time to be any other FPS, especially if you're a shooter like *Shadow Ops: Red Mercury* – a game so basic that you could play it in your sleep.

Yet strangely, it's quite entertaining. Okay, so the plot's

hackneyed and derivative – a terrorist wants to blow up the world with a small, yet deadly nuclear weapon and you have to stop him – but the frenetic gameplay and non-stop mayhem make for an entertaining diversion from loftier pursuits.

For the most part, *Red Mercury* is akin to a moving shooting gallery, as you

and your two ineffectual squad mates bulldoze your way through endless droves of cannon fodder enemies. Level design is kept basic, with red barrels filled with the most explosive substance on earth (computer game barrel filler) conveniently placed near clusters of enemies, just waiting to be blown up.

The game simply sweats testosterone, an unceasing barrage from beginning to end of



For the most part, the game is like a moving shooting gallery.

manly bravado. The guns and explosions are never-ending, though the odd token stealth mission is thrown in. Keep your expectations low, and you'll probably find you'll have a few short hours of fun along the way.

The music and sound effects are excellent, though the former is blatantly ripped off from *The Rock* (the film with Nic Cage, not the wrestler), with a modicum of *James Bond* thrown in for good measure.

It's basic, it's clichéd, it's blokey... oh, and it's expensive and short, but *Shadow Ops: Red Mercury* is still a hoot. If you're after a brainless gun-fest with plenty of blowing-up, give it a few months and see if you can pick it up on the cheap.



Locales include Chechnya and Kazakhstan. We like.



Stealth missions break up the mayhem from time to time.

PCZONE
VERDICT

64

Mindless fun

The weapons are meaty and very satisfying.

NOVEMBER 2004



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BLITZKRIEG: ROLLING THUNDER

£19.99 | Pub: CDV | Dev: Nival Interactive | ETA: November 19

REQUIRES PIII 700, 128MB RAM and a 16MB T&L-compatible 3D card
DESIRE PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32 MB T&L-compatible 3D card

Martin Korda has a cup of tea with an ageing German strategist

LIKE A pubescent boy trying to crack off his seventh of the day, the *Blitzkrieg* WWII RTS series has finally been milked beyond its limits.

Little has changed since the original title, or even the first stand-alone expansion pack, *Burning Horizon*. The engine remains as basic as ever, with pitiful-looking pinprick-sized men scuttling across isometric WWII

battlefields, while the control interface is still as fiddly as ever, especially in the heat of battle.

The main campaign tracks the exploits of legendary American general George S Patton, with battlefields ranging from the barren deserts of North Africa to the weather-beaten fields of Eastern Europe. Each level is preceded by reams of well-written historical

information, and if you're a WWII fanatic, you'll be in your element.

Sadly, *Rolling Thunder* does itself no favours with some highly erratic AI. One moment you're being outmanoeuvred by intelligent use of combined arms, the next you're bulldozing through German defences with little resistance.

However, some magic does still manage to shine through.

The level of historical detail and abundance of units makes for plenty of tactical scope and immersion, and if you can master the control interface you'll find there's still stuff here for you to enjoy. Ultimately though, *Rolling Thunder* is one title too far for *Blitzkrieg*. It's time



Rolling Thunder's engine is painfully dated.



Tank battles are impressive, if a little confusing.

Some missions let you fight as other nations, like the Russians.

MAXIMUS XV ABRAHAM STRONG – SPACE MERCENARY

£29.99 | Pub: Excalibur Publishing | Dev: RebeLmind | ETA: November 19

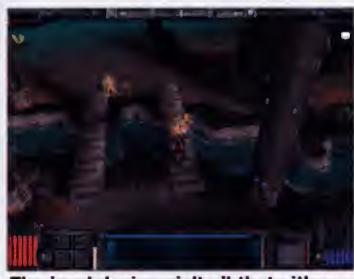
THERE ARE a lot of things we don't understand in this world. *Maximus XV Abraham Strong – Space Mercenary* is one of them. For a start, why does it have such a monumentally ridiculous name, especially since it's been known as 'Space Hack' through its entire development? Furthermore, who in their right mind would want to play this sort of mind-numbing hack 'n' slash RPG anyway? Especially one put together by a bunch of Polish hobbyists

with a penchant for B-grade science fiction and latex.

OK, we made the last bit up, but the game really does have the feel of a shareware title. At its best it's idiotically generic, but in terms of pacing, level design, presentation and, let's face it, total gameplay, it displays a spectacular lack of design nous. It would be funny if it weren't so ball-achingly dull.

Try as we might, we simply don't understand – but of all the mysteries of the universe, this is not one we'll be losing any sleep over.

Anthony Holden



The level design ain't all that either.



It's basically a crap sci-fi *Diablo*.

PCZONE VERDICT

XV

FAIR STRIKE

£19.99 | Pub: GMX Media | Dev: Buka Ent. | ETA: Out Now

HELICOPTER sims are a funny bunch. Either horrifically complex or so pathetically simplistic it feels like you're driving a flying tank, most of them aren't worth leaving terra firma for. *Fair Strike*, we're afraid to say, is no exception.

With its scalable flight models, you can at least make *Fair Strike*'s variety of attack helicopters as impossible or as piss-easy to pilot as you like. Which makes little difference, as what's served up here is seriously second rate.

Visually, it's pants. It's all bland landscapes, boxy vehicles and paltry pyrotechnic effects. As for the plot, it's

what you might imagine Donald Rumsfeld's five-year-old son coming up with – wiping out Arabian terrorists and Columbian drug runners, only with completely implausible scenarios.

Just like *Airwolf*, you'd hope that gameplay would fly to the rescue at this point. It won't. Missions are a matter of approach, hover, blow-crap-out-of-target-while-strafing, repeat. Yes, it's cheap, but this chopper caper is hovering so close to utter shit it might as well be a fly.

Steve O'Hagan

PCZONE VERDICT

28

TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2



TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2

■ £29.99 | Pub: Activision | Dev: Neversoft/Beenox | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 800, 256MB RAM and a 32MB DirectX 9.0c-compliant 3D card

DESires P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, a 128MB 3D card, and an analogue gamepad

The Hawk-man is back in his most ridiculous outing yet. Anthony Holden puts his teeth on the line

UNTIL TONY Hawk's came along, extreme sports games were dull. We didn't realise it at the time, but looking back, how could we have wasted our time with games that didn't allow you to get vertical on a rocket-powered lawnmower, pull air off a steaming pile of bull manure and shoot fireballs out of your skateboard? And all to the tune of Johnny Cash's mesmeric *Ring Of Fire*?

Indeed, it's hard to believe how much fun, stupidity and mayhem the *Hawk* series has managed to elicit from a four-wheeled plank, and *THUG2* is the most comprehensive and inventive yet. For a start, the inclusion of Bam Margera (of *Jackass* notoriety) as guest star is a masterstroke. You may not be a fan of his puerile and malicious brand of humour, but it's a perfect fit for the game's anarchic ethos, and adds a strong sense of character where the clean-cut Hawk could not.

Ridiculous trick combos are still the order of the day, now bolstered with sticker slaps,

post-crash tantrums and slow-mo 'focus' mode. Like *THUG*, you also spend a bit of time off your board, and there's a range of climbing and hanging (and graffiti tagging) actions to help you get around.

While *THUG* veterans might find it all a bit too familiar, it's still impossible not to enjoy – even disenchanted traditionalists are catered for with the return of Classic mode. The online game is brilliant too.

In short, it's probably the best extreme sports game ever made, the only real caveat being that it's rubbish without a decent gamepad.

We couldn't possibly endorse this sort of behaviour.



Crazy, wacky kid.

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PC Extreme Review - Issue 20

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REPLAY

Full price is for suckers! Anthony Holden helps slash your gaming budget

IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

■ 9.99 | Pub: Focus Multimedia | ETA: Out Now

DESPITE all indications to the contrary, the flight sim lives, and it's thanks only to one game. Or rather, one-and-a-half: the original *IL-2 Sturmovik* and this, its magnificent successor. Not a full sequel in the strictest sense, *Forgotten Battles* continues the effort to minutely chronicle the air wars of the Eastern front in World War II, shifting the emphasis only slightly towards the 'forgotten' Russo-Finnish war of 1941-1945. It uses the same engine (tweaked a little), includes all of the original planes and doubles up on some of the environments, but it also brings its own flavour to proceedings.

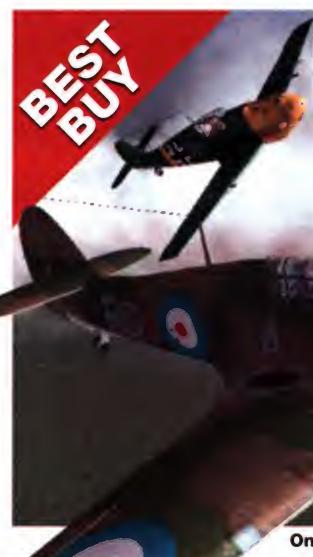
This time, you can play not only as the Soviets and Germans, but also the Finns and Hungarians. Needless to say, this begets a whole host of new aircraft,

each modelled with the same attention to detail the series is famed for. The campaign system is also much improved over the original game, and offers 20 single-player missions alongside the ten new multiplayer scenarios. There are countless add-ons available too, both official and unofficial, which could potentially keep you airborne until the end of time.

Clearly, if you've got even the slightest yearning to dust off the old flight yolk, you should own this game. The only real choice is whether to buy this or the original *IL-2 Sturmovik*, now available for £4.99 on the Focus Revival range. *Battles* is the more comprehensive and polished effort, but both are superb.

PCZONE VERDICT

85



Once again, it's a spotter's paradise.



One of the better games to bear the much-maligned *Might & Magic* moniker.

HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC IV

■ £9.99 | Pub: Mastertronic | ETA: November

TURN-BASED strategy may not be sexy, but it is dangerously addictive, and if you don't know why then look no further than this. *Heroes Of Might & Magic 4* is without doubt the best in the long-running series, set in the same goblin-filled world as its similarly-named RPG stablemates. The graphics are just as crude and functional as we've come to expect from the genre (who knows why?), but the gameplay is at its most refined.

The basic theory is this: choose a hero with a number of mighty and/or magical

properties and set out into the world to raise an all-conquering army. Explore, recruit, fight, regroup and fight some more.

Where the real flair shows is in the many tweaks and additions to the formula, such as the option to auto-resolve battles and the wandering monsters that rove the map. It's a nice attempt to give the genre a bit more vitality, and makes this among the best examples of its kind.

PCZONE VERDICT

80



Desert Yawn more like.



Nice chopper.

CONFlict: DESERT STORM

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

FOR ME, there's no more bland, middle-of-the-road military games than the *Conflict* series. They do nothing that isn't found in a slew of other games, and most of their features are watered-down versions of other more interesting titles. So, you've got some stripped down squad management, a bit of unchallenging third-person combat, a few familiar vehicles and a me-too choice of combat settings.

They appeal because they're not too challenging – you know what you're going to get and you can be confident it's delivered in a polished and competent fashion. *Desert Storm*, the original game in the series, fulfils all

of these criteria – and as such, it's easy to despise. However, in a strange way there's some appeal to its simple, untaxing pleasures. If you want a basic third-person shooter, you could do a lot worse – just don't expect it to change your life.

PCZONE VERDICT

65





Use whatever stealth is necessary to avoid this game.

IGI 2: COVERT STRIKE

■ £9.99 | Pub: Mastertronic | ETA: November

EVER wondered why there's been no *IGI 3*? No, neither have we. Because of course, this over-rated sequel was a big pile of donkey dung.

It's now reappeared as part of Mastertronic's MAD label, reserved for games that sold over 100,000 copies. How it achieved such a target is baffling, given the game's utter lack of outstanding features. The AI is dismal, the missions uninspired, the stealth elements tedious and outdated. As for Davy Jones, Wales' most celebrated gaming

hero, he's not fit to scrub Solid Snake's headband.

Admittedly, the original *Project IGI* was pretty good: although rough around the edges, it was exciting and brought a style of stealth-action to the PC previously reserved for consoles. But after such promising beginnings, this series only went backwards. It's upsetting to think someone might buy this when *Splinter Cell* is available for the same price.

PCZONE VERDICT



32

ANACHRONOX

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now



There are worlds of detail to discover here if you're willing.

ANACHRONOX was always an interesting proposition. Even when it first appeared it took a bit of a leap of faith – a sprawling, futuristic RPG combining Japanese-style turn-based combat and an absurdist sense of humour, based on an already ancient *Quake II* engine. It was never going to be a *Sims*-beater was it? Sure enough, some loved its bizarre characters and seedy environments, some hated its pointless quests and wacky stylings; but nobody ever accused it of a lack of ideas.

Looking at it now, it hasn't aged well. The graphics are blocky and unattractive, the RPG structure clunky, and the whole thing seems rather inelegant next to more recent efforts such as *Star Wars: KOTOR*.

However, rich, epic RPGs such as this – especially ones devoid of fantasy trappings – don't come to our PCs very often, and at this price it's worth a punt. Overlook some of the more obvious flaws and you may well find yourself captivated.

PCZONE VERDICT

73

HOST RECON

■ £4.99 | Pub: Focus Revival | ETA: Out Now

DESPITE being over two years old, *Ghost Recon* is yet to be bettered. Few other games have attempted its marriage of wide-open spaces and squad-level tactics, and even its sequel looks set to take a slightly different direction.

The game has already been on budget for some time, but has now moved to the five-pound 'super-budget' mark. Apart from this fact, it's mainly worth mentioning as a more valid alternative to the new *Tom Clancy's Collector's Edition* compilation (Focus Multimedia, £24.99, Out Now). Comprising *Ghost Recon*, *Splinter Cell*, *Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear Platinum* and *Rogue Spear: Black Thorn*, this pack is vastly overpriced and unnecessary in comparison. The *Rogue Spear* titles are thoroughly outdated, and



Nice posture.

of course you already own *Splinter Cell*. What's that? You don't? Well, then pick that up for a tenner and this for a fiver and you're still ten quid ahead.

PCZONE VERDICT

78

LEFTOVERS

▲ PLEASE SIR, CAN I HAVE SOME MORE?

The season of hope and good cheer is nearly upon us, so what better way to celebrate than with a pile of ropey old games that nobody gives a toss about any more? Here we go then...

Like this one: *Beach Life* (Mastertronic, £9.99, Out November). A typically predictable management game that's in no way as risqué as it suggests, it's about as much fun as sand in your crack. 43 per cent.

Or, if you don't fancy *RollerCoaster Tycoon* on a beach, how about *RollerCoaster Tycoon* in a casino? Except shit! That would be *Casino Empire* (£4.99, Sold Out, Out Now), which gets 58 per cent, if only because it's so goddamn cheap.

Failing that, we've got *Rayman Collector's Edition*, a compilation involving *Rayman 2* and *3*, *Rayman M* and the unfathomable *Rayman Print Studio* (Focus Multimedia, £24.99, Out Now). For that price it's a bit rich, especially as half of the stuff is complete bollocks – 61 per cent.

More affordable cartoon fun is on offer in *Worms World Party* (Sold Out, £4.99, Out Now). This is still a good laugh at 73 per cent.

On a different note, Xplosiv has some Christmas packs on the way, each containing a free bonus game. The pick of the bunch is the stompy robot action of *MechWarrior 4: Vengeance* (Xplosiv, £9.99, Out November 5), which includes the *Black Knight* expansion and weighs in at 72 per cent.

Crossbreeding RTS Impossible Creatures (Xplosiv, £9.99, Out November 5) also makes a reappearance, bizarrely bundled with *Motocross Madness*. Its banal RTS battles are mostly for children and simpletons though: 47 per cent.

Next up is the thoroughly console-oriented *Starsky & Hutch* (Xplosiv, £4.99, Out November 5). It comes with *Total Immersion Racing*, earning a total of 70 per cent.

Finally, mention should be made that the once-mighty *SWAT 3* has moved to super-budget (Sold Out, £4.99, Out Now). It's been outdone in recent times, but is still a classic of squad-based action: 78 per cent.

Joy bells ringing.



Beach Life: cross.



MechWarrior 4: Vengeance: tick.



SWAT 3: double-tick.

THE BATTLE HAS ESCALATED!

SOUTH EAST ASIA, 1856 HRS

Sweat trickles down your neck as you look across at your target, the last rebel base. Enemy troops swarm like ants, desperately trying to organize one last, futile stand. Hidden in the surrounding hillside snipers await your command. Tanks move in from the East blocking the only road out of the pass, as attack helicopters approach from the South, now only a klick away.

Joint operations are in place...let the battle commence!

www.JointOpsTheGame.com

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FEEDBACK

All roads lead there, they do say it wasn't built in a day, and when you're there you have to do as they do. And they made a game about it. And it was good

IT'S YOUR SHOUT

Feedback is here to offer you a platform to have your say about games we've reviewed over the past three issues. Whether you totally agree or utterly disagree with us, we want to hear from you. And all you have to do is get your views in print and send an email to letters@pczone.co.uk with 'Feedback' in the subject line. Please try and keep your views to less than 100 words. Anything longer will not be considered or may have to be edited for size.

ROME: TOTAL WAR

REVIEWED ISSUE 148 (BY MARTIN KORDA), SCORE: 93%

What we said

"As a simulation of warfare and politics, tactics and economy there is no equal to *Rome*. It may be daunting in places and display the (very) occasional rough edge, but for the most part it's exceptional."

What you said

It has spectacularly paced battles, it looks beautiful, the tactical map feels amazingly fluid, and (above all) it's simply an absolute work of art. It's almost as if they read my mind to find out how to make something better even than the previous two games. Even sieges are more fun this time! Ransacking a city with flaming artillery has never been so satisfying...

Moomoocow8

Having been really impressed with *Rome* and played it for an entire day, I'm finding that the campaign is getting a bit crap. Cities are constantly revolting – and don't get me started on the lame battles at sea. The fights, however, do look awesome and the sieges are really good. As Korda said, it seems to have a few bugs lying around – but overall it's a good game that just needs a bit of polish.

Spudy2000

This is easily the best strategy game ever, but it desperately needs a patch to fix some of those flaws and bugs. Why can't we save at the pre-battle screen? Why are the advisors so utterly useless? What happened to the agents/armies pages? Other problems include the sea battles and some

Speakafreaka



Masterpiece? Art form? Or just a game?

"It's epic – I'm nowhere near finishing after hours of play"

SPEAKAFREAKA LIKES PLAYING WITH LONG THINGS

constantly revolting cities that get well past ridiculous. I can understand Creative Assembly wanting to get the sea battles right before implementing them – but of the three periods covered so far the ancient world is the one that suffers the most by not letting us play them. I would also be livid about the exclusion of Macedonia as a playable faction, if Alexander and friends weren't such an obvious choice to base the expansion pack on.

Goattail

What can I say about *Rome: Total War*? Computer-controlled kamikaze generals, revolting peasants, bizarre tactical decisions, archers that shoot your own infantry in the backs of their heads, annoying Senate missions, frustrating crashes to desktop, demoralising corrupt quicksaves; yet, quite utterly, the most fantastic strategy game I have ever played.

Forget the niggles – this game is so grandiose, so picturesque, and so life-draining that it deserves to be remembered for its greatness,



"Alright! Alright! You can all be Spartacus. Happy now?"



Sid Meier, eat your heart out.

and not the bugs. I love the way that the battles have been backed up with such a brilliant world map interface, that allows you to visualise what's going on, where your armies are going to be, and just what your opponent is up to.

Whilst it is true that you can pick up the game and play it very easily, the management of your cities does take time to master. You can let the auto-management do its job, but I reckon it's worth working out for yourself as well. Yes, there are those that say it's too harsh, that managing squalor is too annoying, and cities rebel too easily. But if you play the management side of the game in the same way as *Medieval*, you will not succeed. Too many seem to think that you should beat the game the first time you play it through – I say you have to learn from your mistakes, and adapt your strategy.

Bagsabbis

Martin says

I couldn't agree with you all more. *Rome: Total War* is an exceptional piece of programming, a rare gem of a game that deserves our applause and adulation for its sheer scope and technical excellence. The 3D battles are simply breathtaking, and while some of the AI generals aren't

always that helpful, it's almost impossible to fault this part of the game given how far behind the rest of the genre is languishing behind. And then there's the turn-based strategic map, which is pretty much a game in its own right, featuring more depth and complexity than most games possess in their entirety.

As both the review and many of you have mentioned, there are still some rough edges to be ironed out, but I have it on good authority that Creative Assembly is currently working on a patch to deal with these. *Rome* is exactly what it claims to be, total war, and while the absence of naval battles is a shame, I think you'd be hard pressed to find many games, no matter how good, that you wouldn't like to see improved in some way or another.

You also need to remember that developers must create games within certain timeframes. After all, a game can't be funded indefinitely, and there has to be a cut-off point somewhere. With *Rome*, it seems to be the naval battles. But look on the bright side, you've still got those to look forward to in a future *Total War* game, and personally, I can't wait to see what CA does with them. PC

MOUT

(MILITARY OPERATIONS IN URBAN TERRAIN)

is the term used to describe any type of military action where battles take place in an environment where man-made construction or high population density is the dominant feature, such as a city or town.

This type of fighting requires strategies that differ immensely from fighting on other types of terrain, such as large deserts or jungles.

TECHNIQUES: COVERING APERTURES - CROSSING OPEN TERRAIN - SECURING AN ENEMY

COVERING APERTURES

Enter a building through a doorway.

1. Attention is on the open aperture.
2. Weapon is at the ready, but pointed downwards in case civilians are present.
3. Body is positioned slightly away from wall surface to allow for optimum visual awareness.

visit www.fullspectrumwarrior.co.uk



"A brilliantly tense and original game."
PC Zone, Essential Purchase Award

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CROSSING OPEN TERRAIN

Advancing across open terrain, such as a street, leaves the squad vulnerable to fire from all directions. While one team manoeuvres across the street, the other is in position to provide cover.

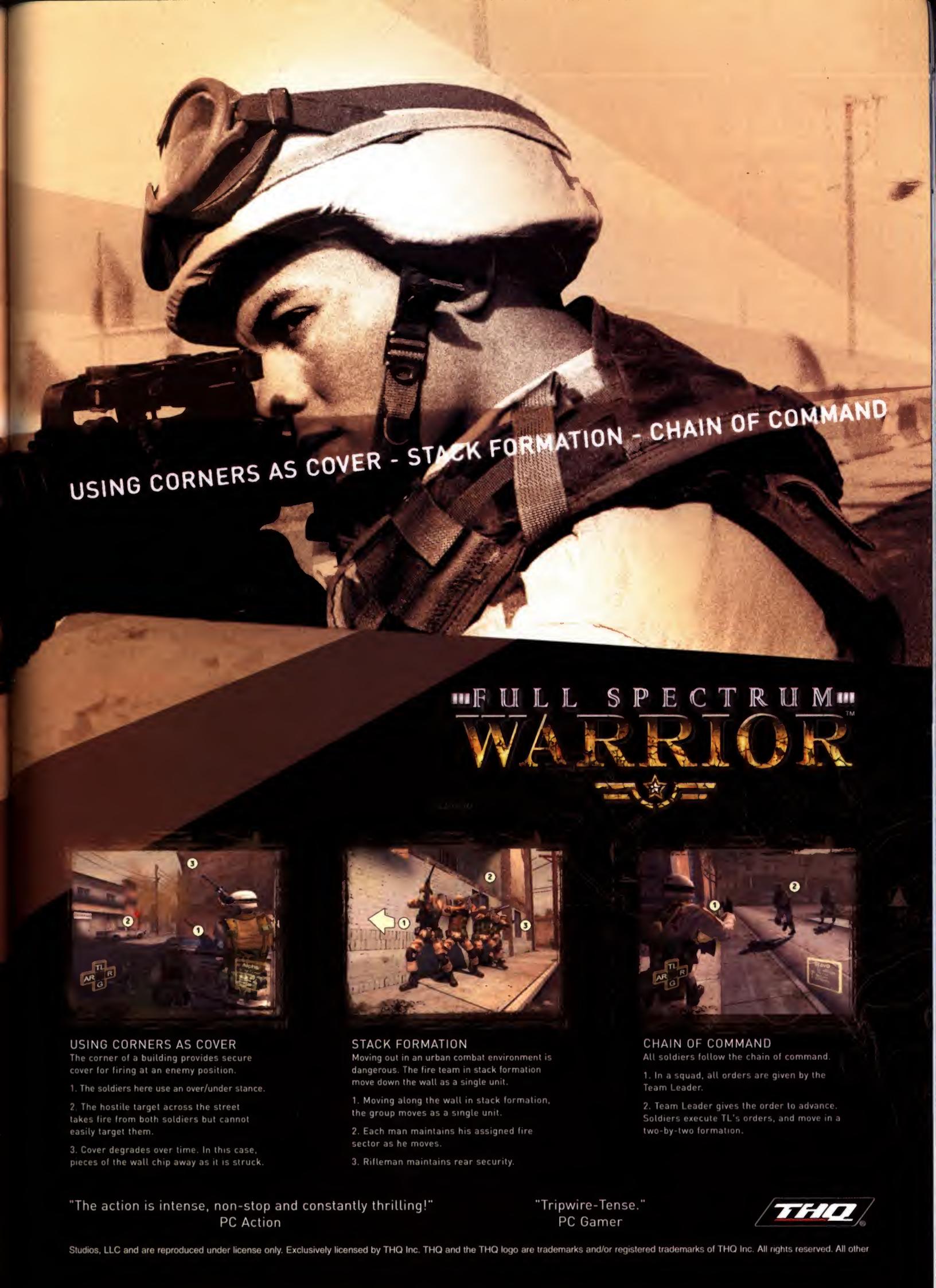
1. Alpha team moves across the street.
2. Bravo team provides covering fire.

SECURING THE ENEMY

After a hostile target is eliminated, his weapons must be recovered so that civilians or children aren't able to use them.

1. One soldier is assigned the task of collecting weapons from the enemy's body.
2. The rest of the fire team forms a perimeter around the body while one soldier guards the enemy with his weapon.

"Stunningly realised and immensely rewarding
- war just shouldn't be this much fun."
92% CVG, Gold Award



USING CORNERS AS COVER - STACK FORMATION - CHAIN OF COMMAND

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR™



USING CORNERS AS COVER

The corner of a building provides secure cover for firing at an enemy position.

1. The soldiers here use an over/under stance.
2. The hostile target across the street takes fire from both soldiers but cannot easily target them.
3. Cover degrades over time. In this case, pieces of the wall chip away as it is struck.



STACK FORMATION

Moving out in an urban combat environment is dangerous. The fire team in stack formation move down the wall as a single unit.

1. Moving along the wall in stack formation, the group moves as a single unit.
2. Each man maintains his assigned fire sector as he moves.
3. Rifleman maintains rear security.



CHAIN OF COMMAND

All soldiers follow the chain of command.

1. In a squad, all orders are given by the Team Leader.
2. Team Leader gives the order to advance. Soldiers execute TL's orders, and move in a two-by-two formation.

"The action is intense, non-stop and constantly thrilling!"
PC Action

"Tripwire-Tense."
PC Gamer

REALITY CHECK: LEISURE SUIT LARRY

Steve Hill becomes loser Larry for a day. Where did it all go wrong?

"I'VE JUST got an eyeful of somebody's mimsy!"

It's Monday afternoon, and I'm eating lobster in a strip club. The offending article is – at this stage – only on a poster, and is only offending my generous (female) host. With the aid of a strategically placed ornate lamp, the meal continues uninterrupted, and I gleefully tear into my Surf 'n' Turf, pausing only to quaff vintage champagne and survey scantly clad women. Shit business.

Our venue is the local branch of Spearmint Rhino, the Gentlemen's Club that promises 'luxury, fine dining and beautiful women'. Ticking all the boxes so far, the food is excellent, there is an admirably strict anti-drugs policy, and the toilets are immaculately clean.

It is here that I transform myself into the vision that is Leisure Suit Larry, star of a spanking new game, and the world's biggest loser in love. Something of a pioneering look, we're talking nylon slacks (two sizes too small), a gaudy yellow shirt with flyaway collars, and a cut-off sports jacket circa 1983. Hair: model's own.

Part Man at C&A, part Mook at Matalan, as I sashay back into the main

area, amazingly nobody gives me a second look, although admittedly there are more interesting attractions on offer. One of these is fellow game character, Sally Mae, a buxom cowgirl who tragically informs me that I should have used the dancers' dressing room instead. No big deal – I've just missed the opportunity of a lifetime in order to squeeze into a pair of child's trousers in front of a man

tired because they've been running through my mind all night," elicits little more than a disinterested shrug. "Should I call you or nudge you for breakfast?" is simply rated "awful".

Scanning my laboriously compiled list for inspiration, I lower the tone with the decidedly questionable "If you're going to throw your virginity away, could I have the box it came in?" Sally Mae cracks me

"I don't know why she's so upset, as I imagine this is one cowgirl who has trouble keeping her calves together"

dispensing aftershave and mints. It is at least in keeping with the spirit of the game, which is essentially an endless series of sexual disappointments.

SHITE LINES

Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude – to give the game its full title – also features some of the most cringeworthy chat-up lines known to man, or more pertinently, woman (see review, page 47). My remit is to emulate Larry and attempt to woo the ladies of Spearmint with my silver tongue. Much lubrication is needed first, but I attempt a few tentative openers on Sally Mae, with predictably limited success.

"If I could rearrange the alphabet, I'd put U and I together," is dismissed as "cheesy", whereas "Your legs must be

round the face with a well-aimed slap and finally, we're getting somewhere.

I don't know why she's so upset, as I would imagine this is one cowgirl who has trouble keeping her calves together. Besides, rank as Larry's lines are, they're not a patch on the worst effort Sally Mae (aka dancer 'Nicki') has heard, which was when a punter calmly informed her that "You look like my 16-year-old daughter."

With my face still stinging from the cowgirl's physical reproach, I turn my attention to her colleague Laura with renewed hope, largely based on her lunchtime promise "I'll see you later – you can have dessert..."

Larry's lines again quash the mood though, with such howlers as, "You remind me



REAL

VS

NOT REAL



WHAT'S A REALITY CHECK?

Reality Check is a monthly feature comparing PC games to their real-life equivalents. Or at least, as close as we can get without risking serious bodily harm.



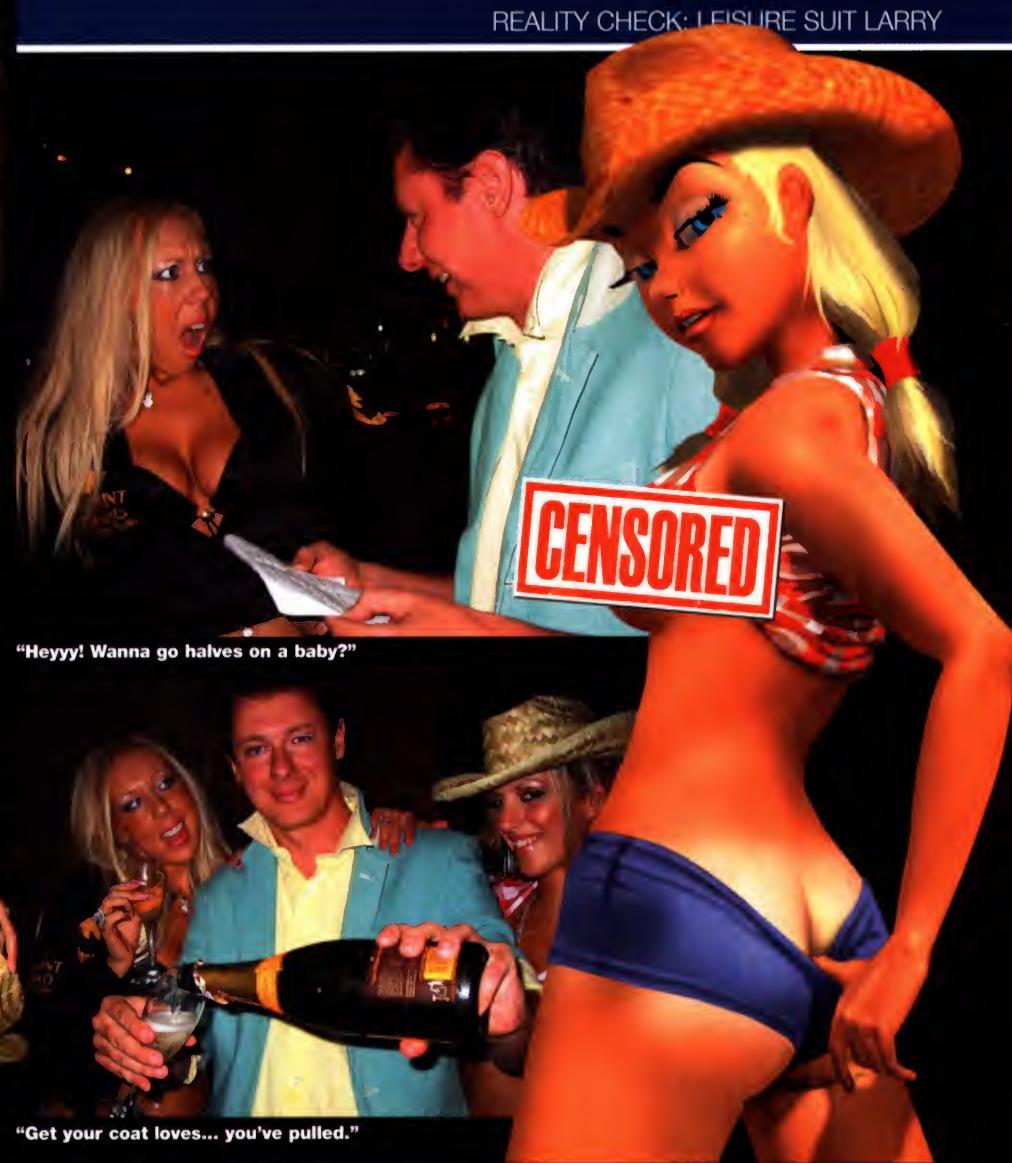
You can't buy class.

Ship-shape and Bristol fashion.





"And just a bit closer please..."



"Heyyy! Wanna go halves on a baby?"

of a magnet – you sure are attracting me," is rejected as "terrible". As for "Is there an airport nearby or is that my heart taking off?" Laura interjects with "Oh no, these are awful! How do you know all these?"

Explaining that they're from the game, I decide to throw the script away and ask her what does work? Astonishingly, she claims: "Your jacket has worked already. It looks like Gucci or Versace. You could put a D&G on the back." Actually, it's from this season's highly anticipated TK Maxx range, but with Laura grabbing the lapels and thrusting my face into her ample bosom, it appears that Larry is about to break his duck.

DANCE DANCE DANCE

However, my purse-wielding representative reminds me that the idea is to stick to the story of the game, the early section of which involves Larry having a dance with Sally Mae. Stuck between a pair of knockers and a hard place, for the sake of authenticity I reluctantly agree to a private dance with the frisky cowgirl, who leads me into a darkened room and pushes me into the upholstery. By rights, a bit of Country & Western should kick in, but George Michael makes for an unlikely replacement and Sally Mae begins her routine.

Gyrating like a rodeo winner, it's a promising start, but as she raises her hand to whip her top off she inadvertently clips my glass of champagne, spilling its contents into my lap. The sensation of damp nylon against my groin is admittedly a new one, but not necessarily worth the £20 cover fee. I came in here for a five-minute dance, not an argument, but when Sally Mae claims that it was a "bad place to leave it," I'm forced to respond, "What, on the table?"

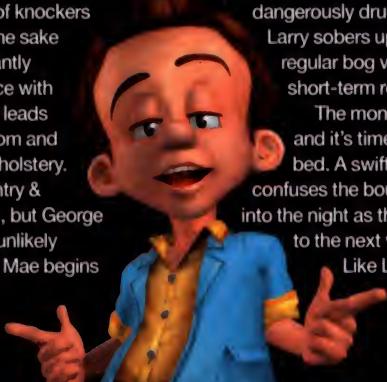
Attempting to lighten the mood, I exclaim "Incredible nipples, you could hang a duffel coat on those." (That was mine.) It's not so much a chat-up line as a statement of fact, but all Sally Mae can do is complain, "I stink of champagne."

In fairness, she throws in a couple of extra minutes as compensation for drenching me, but by this stage I am barely able to raise a smile. Again

mirroring the game, I am now dangerously drunk, but whereas Larry sobers up by taking a piss, regular bog visits provide only short-term relief.

The money has run out, and it's time to put Larry to bed. A swift costume change confuses the bouncers, and I slip into the night as the girls move on to the next walking wallet.

Like Larry, we're all losers. **PC**



HOW REAL IS... LEISURE SUIT LARRY: MAGNA CUM LAUDE



Possible the best spermatozoa in a mini-game yet.

SHOW US YOUR BUM FOR 20 POUND

In the game, Larry manages to talk girls out of their clothes by wooing them with his suggestive lines. In reality, this didn't work. He also dresses like a dick and becomes drunk and offensive, all of which was mirrored uncannily accurately. By the end of the day in Spearmint, communication was reduced to levels of primeval grunting, and although the girls did get their kit off, we can't help thinking it was more to do with the cash than the chat.



THE JURY

	DAVID 'MAX PLEASURE' WOODS
	MARTIN 'XXX' KORDA
	WILL 'BARELY LEGAL' PORTER
	PAUL 'PORN STAR' PRESLEY
	JAMIE 'UNDER THE COUNTER' SEFTON



SUPERTEST: ADULT GAMES

THE CONTENDERS

	DOOM 3 ISSUE 146, SCORE 90%
	GTA: VICE CITY ISSUE 131, SCORE 95%
	MANHUNT ISSUE 143, SCORE 74%
	MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE ISSUE 136, SCORE 93%
	THE SUFFERING ISSUE 145, SCORE 84%

Martin Korda and the PC ZONE gang cogitate, deliberate and ruminate over the cream of adult-themed games...

HERE'S A QUESTION for you. Which one of these has the more 'adult' theme? A carefully structured story of love, intrigue and betrayal in which the protagonist battles insurmountable odds and becomes embroiled in an unlikely and complicated relationship, or a busty wench called Leticia spreading her legs and challenging you to a game of strip poker?

Sadly, games developers have all too often suffered from the misguided notion that gratuity and not maturity make for an adult theme. Not only is this frustrating for anyone above the age of ten, it also paints an unfair stereotype of gamers being either pathetic pallid-skinned loners whose only chance of scoring is by playing *Pro Evo*, or as being easily-led, would-be mass murderers





ready to copy anything they see on their monitors.

So this month, we've taken a collection of BBFC 15+ rated titles and expertly dissected them to see which one best melds adult themes with great gameplay. What's more, we've also investigated how far adult-themed games have come – or not – in recent years, what makes a good adult game, and whether they really are only fit for the more mature gamer. Want to know more? Read on...

GTA: VICE CITY

Jamie: It's got adult themes, but it's all very tongue-in-cheek. If you look at a lot of games that set out to shock, you can see that *Vice City* is above all of them. It handles the adult themes with an incredible amount of style and it's very funny to play. If anyone gets offended by playing *Vice City*, then they're a moron.

Dave: People do get offended by *Vice City*, but only when they watch you play it – like if someone walks into a room and sees you battering someone with a baseball bat.

Paul: *GTA* is gratuitous, but deliberately so, and this elevates it and makes it perhaps one of the most mature games here. Other 'immature' titles revel in their shock value: *Vice City* satirises them.

Martin: When you play it, it doesn't seem to matter what you do in it, because it always feels more amusing than gratuitous. If the graphics had been grittier and more realistic, like in *Max Payne 2*, then I think it would



have experienced far more problems than it did. Whereas the other games here are very clearly not made for kids, the cartoonish style of *Vice City* screams out 'Made For Teenagers'!

Dave: Exactly. There's nothing really in there that the average 15 or 16-year-old couldn't handle. If you took away all of the satire and humour from the radio stations, then it would be pretty much a kids' game. Even the swearing is pretty mild, and the cartoon violence is fairly inoffensive.

Will: You sell drugs out of an ice cream van – it's not like you're selling heroin to junkies down an alley.

Jamie: It borrows a lot from popular culture and films like *Scarface*. Rockstar makes games for people who've grown up with games from the early '80s. It's tapped into the fact that gaming is getting older. There are people out there in their late 20s and early 30s who've been playing games for 20 years, and *Vice City's* Commodore 64 loading screen just goes to show that Rockstar's aware of the market.

Dave: I'm surprised it got an 18-rating though. It feels more like a 15 to me.

Martin: Yeah, me too.

Dave: Saying that though, I suppose some of the content, cartoon or not, just meant it was impossible to be rated 15.

Martin: What really helps make it feel like an adult game is its attention to detail. You don't feel like you're being fobbed off by some cobbled



Vice City's cartoonish graphics make it more amusing than shocking.

together game that's been made for kids who just want to collect objects X, Y and Z, or lap a circuit faster than their mates.

Vice City feels like you're playing in a real world.

Jamie: The dialogue is excellent as well. It's all very stylish and polished, even the swearing feels realistic and not in the least bit gratuitous.

Paul: There are too many hang-ups in this world about language as it is. Sticks and stones, people...

Martin: Anyone can throw swear words into a game and get an 18-rating, but that doesn't make it an adult game.

Jamie: The voice-actors and soundtrack are amazing too. There's nothing else out there that can touch it in terms of polish. Look at *True Crime*...

Martin: Ah, the poor man's *GTA*. **Jamie:** ...It's a little like *GTA*, but lacks the depth and playability of *Vice City*. Even the vehicles don't handle nearly as well. The motorbikes in *Vice City* feel fantastic to ride, especially when you pull a wheelie or smack into a lamp-post.

Martin: If you go back ten years, you can see just how far adult games have come. Back then there was a bit of violence, a bit of swearing and loads of tits, and that was pretty much it. You had games like *Sam Fox's Strip Poker* and *Leisure Suit Larry*, and they were only played by pubescent boys who cracked off five times a day. Either that, or by bored 40-year-old men who hadn't had it in months and cracked off three times a day, because they weren't as young as they were. (Dave looks wistfully into the distance for a moment.)

Dave: I remember the days

when I could crack off five times a day...

Martin: Now games like *Vice City* are packed with genuine adult themes and are no longer gratuitous or cheap.

Paul: I don't think that's true. If anything, it's the reverse.

Because the technology was limited back then, the games had to be more intelligent and mature in terms of themes and nature just to create their worlds. These days, it's become all about the money, so games publishers simply pander to the lowest common-paying denominator, hence gratuity and shock values.

Jamie: That's why I hate games like *Leisure Suit Larry*. They just reaffirm this clichéd stereotype that gamers just want to look at naked girls.

Dave: There are still games that are aimed at 12-year-olds and adults with a mental age of 12, and *Leisure Suit Larry* is one of those. But there are also people out there who'll enjoy them, even if we don't.

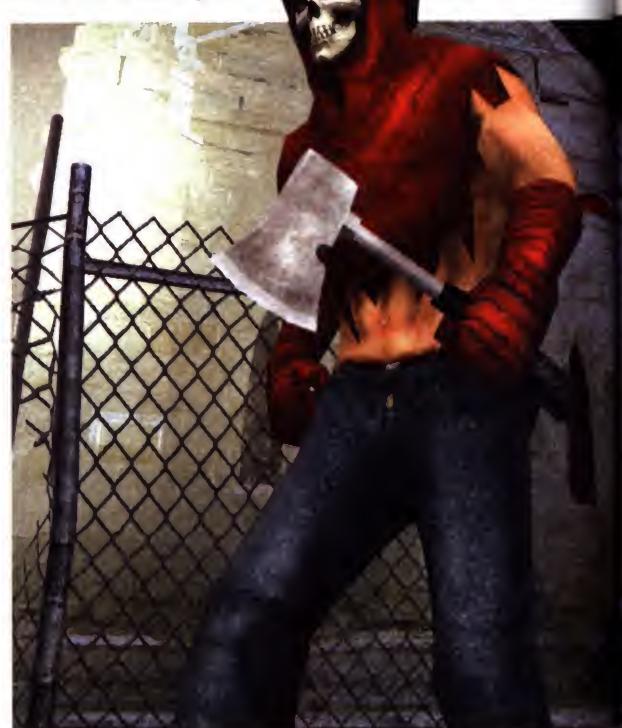
MANHUNT

Martin: Right, *Manhunt*.

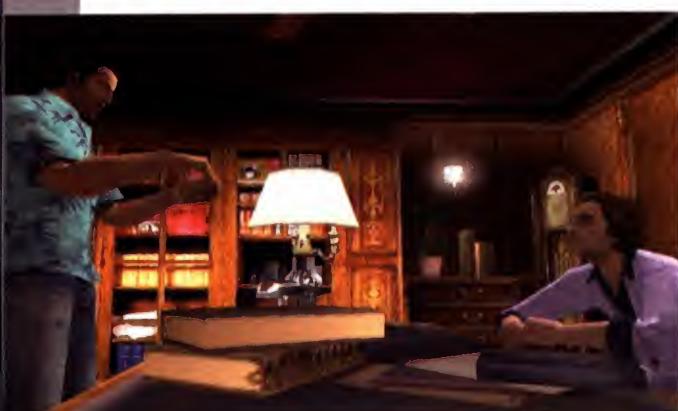
Paul: Aka *Lowest Common Denominator: The Game*.

Jamie: When I first played it, I was shocked at how violent it was, but I think it's very stylish. Some of the videotape cut-scenes are brilliant.

Dave: It's a fair point, but if you compare it to *Vice City*, which is one of the best games ever made, you can't help but think that Rockstar should just concentrate on



Manhunt. Gratuitous or adult? You decide.



Vice City's mature script gives it a more adult theme.

making great games and not games like this. It's an empty game with a little bit of style.

Jamie: It's a bit like a slasher movie.

Dave: Yeah, but even slasher movies need to be done well to make them good.

Paul: No-one honestly believes that slasher movies are in any way mature though, surely?

Jamie: They can be. The soundtrack here is brilliant and there are so many great little touches to it. It has its place in the 'slasher adult game' genre.

Martin: Sure, it's got good production values, but *Manhunt* makes the mistake that a lot of badly directed horror movies make. It relies on gratuitous violence to try and make itself an adult game. You don't see people having sex in *Vice City*, it's implied by cars rocking. Here, everything is so gratuitous. It's like watching *Alien* and *Aliens 4*. The first one doesn't show you an alien till about the 75th minute, while the second one shows you one almost immediately. That's why *Alien* is so scary and *Aliens 4* isn't.

Jamie: The gratuitousness here was done on purpose. In films, you have different directors and so different styles. The same applies to *Manhunt*. It purposefully goes for the slasher movie low-budget feel, and that's one of the things I really like about it.

Dave: *Manhunt* needs a little bit of humour injected into it, or a decent story. As it is, it's just too relentless, and while I loved this kind of thing when I was

younger, I don't think it's the kind of thing that adults really go for. This is where the danger comes in, because this game is much more likely to appeal to the younger gamer than the older one.

Martin: And the further you get into the game, the less adult it becomes. It eventually turns into a shooter, which makes me think that the gratuitous violence at the beginning was stuck in there to get an 18-rating, and so help shift a sub-standard game.

Will: My problem with it is that it isn't a good game. It does have some great presentation, but underneath that, it's incredibly empty.

Paul: It was hyped as a gruesome game from the start. As part of Rockstar's marketing, we were sent a real garrote in the post. You could have actually killed someone with it. That was just crass.

Paul: To be honest, none of these games are really aiming at an 'adult' market, not if they're being truthful. To a man, they're all aimed at the nebulous late-teen audience. You know, where the most disposable income is. Rockstar knows this more than most.

Will: Rockstar relied on its reputation with *GTA* to try and sell *Manhunt*.

Jamie: I think you're bigging-up Rockstar too much. Kids don't give a shit who made the game.

Paul: It's not the kids that sell the games though. The distributors care about who made it and that's what's important to the business.

Will: Yeah, but people who played *GTA* would see *Manhunt* was made by the same company and that would get them interested.

Jamie: But it's nothing like *GTA*, it's not even in the same league.

Dave: So long as it's rated an 18, and the shops make sure they don't sell it to anyone under that age, I have no real problem with it.

Jamie: I'd have no objection to it being rated a 12.

Will: What?!

Martin: The general public still thinks that games are made for kids and they're not, especially ones like *Manhunt*. They don't look at the ratings, they just pick up a game and assume it's OK for their kids to play it, and then blame the game if their kids try to copy what they see on-screen. There needs to be a universal BBFC rating for every game. U, PG, 12, 15 and 18.

Dave: And 18R.

Martin: That way, no-one could ever be left in any doubt what

games are suitable for children. Then maybe we'd finally find that people stop blaming games for every evil in the world.

Dave: I don't know why a single legal body doesn't rate every game. It takes things like the *Manhunt* outcry to make governments act, by which time it's too late. Rating every game makes sense.

Jamie: I think an average 13-year-old could play *Manhunt* without a problem.



Better than beating him to death with a copy of the *Daily Mail*.

hand that could kill someone. (Jamie starts turning red with anger.)

Will: I read somewhere that *Doom 3* was being labelled as the game that's breeding a new generation of killer. (Jamie erupts.)

Jamie: The *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* would say that. If someone was shot and they found a copy of *Doom 3* in the killer's bedroom, I can promise you now that *Doom 3* would be blamed.

Dave: What would happen if they found a copy of the *Daily Mail* at the killer's house? Would they blame the paper? (Everyone laughs.)

Jamie: If someone beat someone else to death with a copy of the *Daily Mail*, they'd probably still pin it on computer games. They'd probably blame *Paperboy*.

Will: *Doom 3* doesn't warrant an 18-rating though. It has its scary moments, but there aren't really any adult themes.

Dave: It's a classic zombie game.

"How many cubic litres of blood makes the difference between a 15- and an 18-rating?"

YOU CAN HEAR PAUL PRESLEY TUTTING FROM HERE



Just imagine what would've happened if I'd shot him in the face.





Doom 3 has you jumping out of your seat on a regular basis.

Paul: It's just another mindless slasher with a pretty new graphics engine. It's still as vapid as the original.

Martin: It just feels that Doom 3 has been caught in a time warp, because of what happened with the original. That's the only reason it got an 18-rating instead of a 15.

Dave: Although saying that, I played it the other night when I was hungover, waited till my flatmate left, then played it in the dark for two hours and really was very distressed by the end of it.

Will: The thing is, the further you get in it, the less scary it gets, especially when you get the bigger guns.

Paul: Which is what life is all about. A never-ending race for bigger guns. People need to read more books...

THE SUFFERING

Dave: The swearing at the start is quite shocking.

Will: It doesn't really feel gratuitous though.

Dave: It feels very natural.

There's a great atmosphere right from the off. You know straight away that you're in for a proper adult survival horror game.

Jamie: Some horror games have scared me even when the graphics weren't very good.

However, with visuals constantly improving, games are getting much better at scaring people.

Paul: You don't have to be an adult to be scared though. I spent my youth in a permanent state of trepidation.

Dave: There's a real difference between Doom's jumps and the sophisticated scares of

The Suffering. Jumps are very easy to do, whereas *The Suffering* disturbs you.

Martin: It seems to mix Doom 3 and Max Payne 2 with its horror elements and flashbacks.

There's an intelligence to *The Suffering* that Doom 3 doesn't have, like the murder of your wife and kids and who really did it.

Will: Yeah, and those voices in your head that tell you someone is good or bad.

Jamie: It treats you like an intelligent human being, rather than a moron. You don't always know what's going to happen.

Dave: Horror games really need to move away from the slow, cumbersome gameplay of old, and this really manages to do that.

Will: I haven't been so surprised by a game for a long time. I think it's been overlooked by many people.

Jamie: It doesn't help that it was a console port, but I definitely think it's going to be one of those games that goes down as one of the top ten most underrated games ever.

Paul: I'll admit it subscribes to the modern 'Hollywood' version of mature scripting.

Martin: The start of the game really reminded me of *Aliens Vs Predator 2*. You don't see any enemies for ages, you just see guards getting pulled up through holes and thrown through windows and hear screams in the background. That's great – fear is all about what you don't see rather than what you do.

Jamie: Part of the problem with these games is that they have

really poor dialogue. Most of the text adventures in the early '80s had better scripts than many so-called adult games. But *The Suffering* has one of the best scripts around. It's also great how it starts, just like *Half-Life*.

Martin: You feel like you're in a life-and-death situation from the outset, not just plopped down on level one of a videogame. The attention to detail is superb and you never feel patronised. In fact, you rarely feel as though you're playing a game at all.

Jamie: This game is definitely the way forward for adult horror games.

Paul: I'd prefer to see them head towards the cerebral horror of HP Lovecraft myself. True fear is in the mind, not the rotting flesh of a zombie.

MAX PAYNE 2

Dave: I love this game, it's absolutely brilliant.

Martin: Everything about it is gritty, lifelike, dark and polished. It's just got everything you want from an adult game. And it's not even an 18, which just goes to show what you can do if you craft a game properly.

Jamie: The thing that really does it for me is that it's just so cool. I love the comic book bits.

Dave: The plot is actually really complicated.

Martin: Definitely. Even though I didn't like the comic book parts, the story has so many dimensions to it. It's far deeper than you'd expect a ten-hour game to be.

Paul: True. It's one of the only games here with any semblance of characterisation.

Jamie: It's very much like a film

"It's gritty, lifelike, dark and polished. It's got everything you want from an adult game"

MARTIN KORDA TIPS HIS HAT TO MAX PAYNE 2

noir, whereby you don't know whether all the characters are good or bad. I think that's another definition of adult, when things aren't black and white. It's complex and deals with adult emotions and issues.

Dave: The gaming environment compared to something like *Sonic The Hedgehog* is an adult playground. It's not gratuitous in anyway though, and it's very, very cool.

Jamie: It's got hate, love, despair, fear, anger and revenge, all of which are very complex emotions.

Will: And there's a believable relationship between Mona and Max.

Martin: I think the games industry has really overlooked the power of the love interest in games. It doesn't have to be gratuitous like two people shagging in a shower. Once you enter your teens, you want to play a game where you can have a relationship with someone – not because you're sad, but because it adds an extra emotional and very adult depth to

the game. And *Max Payne 2* has got it spot on.

Jamie: It's much deeper than the 2D emotions of *Leisure Suit Larry*.

Dave: You can have deep emotions in *Leisure Suit Larry*. How about that bit where whoever can flip the most amount of coins into a pint pot gets to shag the girl?

Martin: *Max Payne 2*'s not about tits and sex, it's about the complexities involved in an adult relationship. It's the same principal whether you're doing love or horror. You can't just throw something blatant up on the monitor and simply expect it to be considered adult.

Paul: It still treats the concept of killing with gay abandon though. I'm still waiting for the day when shooting someone is a last resort for a game character.

Will: It's come a long way since the first game, which seemed much more gratuitous and childish by comparison. Like when you find that gang lord getting a blow job. *Max Payne 2* feels so much more grown up. □



Max Payne 2 rolls over the opposition.



Sophie Ellis-Bextor reacts badly to her latest chart position.

AND THE WINNER IS... MAX PAYNE 2



TOP ADULT PLEASURE FROM MAX PAYNE 2



Max Payne 2: proving that a great adult game doesn't have to be 18-rated.

In the end, it was the one game in the list without an 18-certificate that came out on top. With its perfect pacing and superb script, *Max Payne 2* ran away with the title of top adult game.

For Dave, there was no doubt about which game should win. "Max Payne 2 is intelligently crafted and captures the imagination of an adult audience," he chimed.

But Jamie wasn't quite so sure, as he agonised between *Vice City* and *Max Payne 2*.

Eventually he chose *Vice City*: "It's so much fun and its adult humour makes me laugh." Paul mirrored Jamie's choice, stating: "For all of its gratuity, there's at least a semblance of ironic knowingness about *Vice City*."

However, the voting swung back in Max's favour as both Will and Martin voted for Payne. "Max Payne 2 has so many different themes and emotions in it," enthused Will. Martin agreed: "It's the most intelligent and mature game here."

OUR VERDICT

THE SCORES ON THE DOORS

JURY	WINNER (2PTS)	RUNNER UP (1PT)
PAUL	GTA: VICE CITY	MAX PAYNE 2
WILL	MAX PAYNE 2	THE SUFFERING
JAMIE	GTA: VICE CITY	MAX PAYNE 2
DAVE	MAX PAYNE 2	DOOM 3
MARTIN	MAX PAYNE 2	GTA: VICE CITY

POSITION	GAME	POINTS
1ST:	MAX PAYNE 2	8 PTS
2ND:	GTA: VICE CITY	5 PTS
3RD:	DOOM 3	1 PT
3RD:	THE SUFFERING	1 PT
5TH:	MANHUNT	0 PTS

OVER TO YOU

THE PEOPLE HAVE SPOKEN AND THE VOTES ARE IN



Max Payne 2 shoots down the opposition.

We've had our say, now it's over to you. Whatever your thoughts and opinions, we want to hear them. Simply jump onto www.pczone.co.uk, register your vote and leave your comments for us to peruse. And because we always print a selection of your opinions, you may even get to see your comments right here on these pages. A big thank you if you've already voted and posted your comments this time around. Here's just a taster of what was said...

Max Payne 2 doesn't rely solely on violence to be adult – it uses a great storyline about love and betrayal that drives the game on, and incorporates it seamlessly into the fantastic gameplay.

escaped_monkey knows a great adult game when he sees one

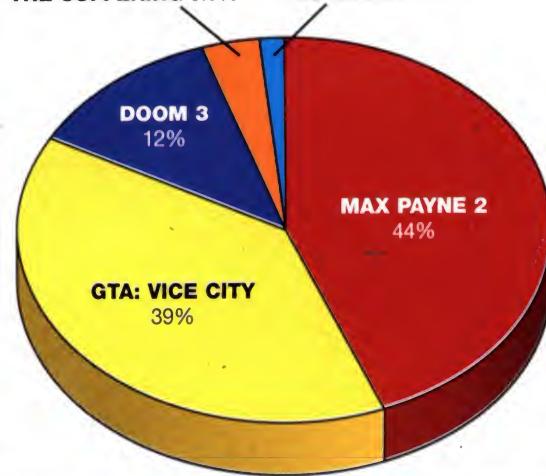
Love, anger, depression, revenge. *Max Payne 2* covers all of these subjects well and never lets the violence detract from the storyline. That to me is what makes an adult title.

davidmc555 likes his games Payneful

Vice City gets my vote. It's got hookers, robberies, assassinations and car jacking, as well as a fantastic '80s soundtrack that only the more mature gamer would appreciate.

RaTang shows his love of *Vice City*. And his age

THE SUFFERING 3.5% MANHUNT 1.5%



READER VOTES

MAX PAYNE 2	44%
GTA: VICE CITY	39%
DOOM 3	12%
THE SUFFERING	3.5%
MANHUNT	1.5%



DOOMTM
3

IT'S COMING



BRINGER DEATH

BRINGER FOR YOU

Developed By



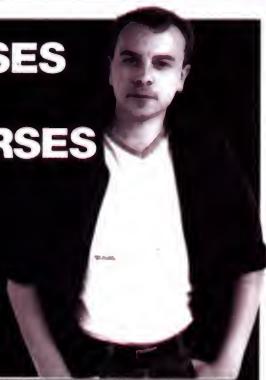
Distributed By



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ONLINE ZONE

HORSES FOR COURSES



■ ONLINE EDITOR: Paul Presley

▲ Ooh, you could see the fur rising this month in the *ZONE* office. "77 per cent!" spluttered young Master Will on seeing the finalised *City Of Heroes* review (page 124). "Wrong, wrong, so very wrong," he fumed, as though we'd issued a direct insult to his mask-wearing alter ego, NightPorter, slapping his virtual face with a mark of inadequacy (well, he is only level nine) through our words of faint reviewing praise.

It does nicely illustrate a point, though. Whatever the game, however good, bad or average it may be, there will always be people who get a huge amount of enjoyment out of it. *Ryzom* doesn't exactly fare brilliantly this month either (see page 126), but a quick recce of the online forums shows a sizeable audience quite happy to live within the limiting confines of its gaming structure.

Are they wrong? Yes, of course they are. Goes without saying. But it doesn't invalidate their pleasure. However, that doesn't mean that MMO developers should be allowed to get away with shoddy design on the assumption that 'someone'll play it so let's just get it out there and get the cashflow running.' There is as much room for innovation in gaming design in this genre as in any other.

The *EverQuest* template may have served us well till now, but as connection speeds increase and processing technology gets ever faster, the possibilities for MMO gaming are long overdue a creative growth spurt. There's so much more that can be done with online gaming and so few people trying to break moulds and push envelopes right now. So don't expect

PC *ZONE* to reward something merely for being popular. A public mandate is no basis for a system of government after all.

KOREAN MMOG HAS KHAN-DO SPIRIT

REWRITING MEDIEVAL HISTORY WHILE CONQUERING THE ONLINE WORLD

GENGHIS KHAN

last troubled the world in the 13th century, sweeping through the Asian continent with his Mongol horde and knocking on Europe's door before his sudden death put a halt to his murderous campaign. It takes more than decomposition and almost 800 years of global progress to keep a good barbarian down though, and thanks to a leading publisher of Korean online games, Khan's wrath has returned and he's once more sweeping across Asia, decimating all before him... virtually speaking, of course.

Miriniae Entertainment first unleashed *Khan The Absolute Power* in November 2003 and is currently doing huge business in Korea, with almost 400,000 subscribers regularly logging on to do battle in the 13th-century landscape of Eurasia.

The game takes up the story towards the end of Geng's expedition, throwing players into the one part of the world old horny-head was never able to conquer, while adding a distinctly 'fantasy' element to the proceedings. Character choices range from Knights to Sorcerers to Necromancers, and you'll not only have to fend off the Mongol hordes but traditional fantasy fare such as forest giants and the undead. As you rise in power and fame, you'll be encouraged to



Looks like someone forgot their sunscreen.

team up with player guilds to build your own kingdoms and battle for rival lands. As befits the historical setting, mighty rulers can develop their own personal family trees through inter-game marriages and family settings.

Miriniae's plan for *Khan* has always been to expand to as many real-world territories as

possible, with servers already turning up throughout Asia (a recent deal with the leading Philippine telco and an upcoming launch in Thailand next March should boost numbers significantly). One factor that's helping the game's popularity is that the client is always distributed to players free of charge.

Talks are currently ongoing with several leading UK internet gaming services, and according to sources, all the signs are looking extremely healthy for a big announcement soon about *Khan*'s UK/European debut. We'll bring you a full look in a few months' time.

- Publisher: TBA
- Developer: Miriniae Entertainment
- ETA: TBA
- Website: khan.miriniae.com



Green sky at night, sorcerers delight.



Trouser technology has yet to progress.



Genghis Khan couldn't fly, could he?



116

WORLD OF WARCRAFT
Blizzard's answer to *EverQuest II*

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EQII CHARACTER TOOL
Creating your online alter egos

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CITY OF HEROES
The ZONE men pull on their tights

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THE SAGA OF RYZOM
Our review digs beneath the soil

"Mighty rulers can develop their own family trees through in-game marriages and family settings"



WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

WHY PAY TO PLAY WHEN THE INTERWEB PROVIDES FUN FOR FREE?



Better than anti-aging cream.

EXILE

(WWW.EXILEGAME.CO.UK)

Anyone remember *Atic Atac*?

Probably not. You're all far too young and carefree to concern yourself with the classic gaming hits of yore. But if you're the type of chap who decries modern music as loud noise in which you can't hear the words – ie you're old – then those two words will probably bring floods of nostalgic tears to your wrinkled eye bags.

Of course, we all know that nostalgia is the biggest lie-trip that society has foisted on us and no amount of Paul Ross/Stuart Maconie soundbites about why listening to Haircut 100 while playing with gongs was the best time of your life can convince us otherwise. But *Atic Atac*, surprisingly, has stood the test of time fairly well. But to all good things comes a 21st-century makeover, and here it's in the shape of *Exile*.

Exile is the brainchild of Orangagidd, a team of developers whose stated aim is to 'bring back the gameplay and strategy of '80s games' – about as noble a cause as you can get in our eyes. *Exile* is a cross between the dungeon exploring of *Atic Atac* and the manic action of *Gauntlet* (minus the four-player mayhem that marked that particular game out as a school lunchtime classic of its day).

You can play the first campaign for free (with the full subscription costing a mere fiver), and we can't say enough good things about it. If only because it makes us feel young and virile again.



"Green Elf needs food."

THE ONLINE SHORTS

JACKING IN TO THE VIRTUAL NEWS NETWORK



WHO ANEW

The Curse of Zone isn't as potent a force as we thought. Shortly before going to press, news arrived that Climax has announced plans to give the kiss of life to the previously cancelled *Warhammer Online*. Games Workshop is helping with development, and the hopes are high for a release in around 18 months' time.

REEVE R.I.P.

The sad passing of Christopher Reeve was marked recently by the virtual superheroes of *City Of Heroes* in a series of tributes. Players across several of the game's servers took a moment to gather and pay tribute to the inspirational actor and campaigner for spinal cord research, who died on October 10.

4KINGS UPDATE

More late-breaking news as the CPL announced that the game of choice for its upcoming world tour is to be *Painkiller*, not *Doom 3* as expected. Last month's 4Kings Intel competition is still valid and updated details are at www.four-kings.com, although naturally the team is looking for *Painkiller* players instead.

MIR APOLOGY

Two issues ago we ran a story on *The Legend Of Mir 3* coming to Europe. Unfortunately we printed an incorrect web address for the game. It should have read www.mir3europe.com and we'd like to apologise for any inconvenience caused. You can check out our full review of *Mir 3* next month.

CLAN DIARY

SCEE
SCEE

ANNE ROGERS, aka Jaffy
www.scee-clan.co.uk

As winter descends, the cold world outside makes evening gaming so much more appealing. So it's a shame when home and academic commitments prevent us from doing what we love! The beginning of the new academic year is an issue for many clans around now. A well-organised team with a whole commitment-free summer to hone their tactics can suffer quite a blow when some of their number are drawn to a new university or college life – and SCEE is no different! The problems female clans experience when recruiting can, I'm sure, be imagined by all.

So, I asked my team-mates how they make time for work and home commitments alongside their gaming, and how they strike a balance.

"I don't work as much as I should because I'm addicted to C-S. I'm good at what I'm doing, and as long as it's fun, I spend as much time as I need to improve," says [SCEE*L]Mia.

"I don't work, but I do have a three-year-old daughter who takes up a lot of my time," says

"The new academic year affects everyone, but it's harder to find replacements for a female-only team"



Finding time, whatever life brings.

[SCEE*L]Clare. "I usually play C-S in the evenings, once she's in bed and my housework's done."

[SCEE*L]Happy-Bunny: "I work full-time but I'm the boss, so I can play C-S as much as I like. Sometimes I have bad patches and don't want to play much – other times, it's all I want to do."

As for [SCEE*L]Julie, she confides: "I find time because I send my partner out to work..."

Even in our modern society, female gamers face more distractions than their male counterparts, despite the sharing of domestic chores and the prevalence of house-husbands. However, it could also be argued that, being at home all day, women find more of an opportunity to game. The gap between the time that women and men spend gaming is lessening, and more and more females play games with their partners.

Despite all this, the new school or university year affects everyone, but it's so much harder to find replacements for a female-only team. So introduce your girlfriend, partner or sister to the game you play and see how they get on. But be prepared – they might like it and beat you...

Namco is set to release *Tales Of Eternia*.

Fantasy Earth promises to be a genre-busting MMO.

MMOG IN JAPAN

MAJOR PLAYERS ANNOUNCE NEW TITLES FOR 2005

WITH FINAL *Fantasy XI* proving to be a hit, the MMO floodgates have opened in Japan. The recent Tokyo Game Show saw several of the region's big names announcing online titles for the PC platform, prompting hopes that the moribund Japanese PC gaming market might be granted a new lease of life.

FFXI developer Square Enix led the way with *Fantasy Earth: The Ring Of Dominion*, a genre-busting adventure that combines role-playing, action and strategy in a world where five kings fight for control of the land. Castle warfare is

promised, with the option to build your own battlements.

Meanwhile, Namco is planning to release an online version of popular PlayStation hit *Tales Of Eternia*. It's set to feature traditional 2D viewpoints, social interaction (including cookery options) and the series' Skit system, a conversational method that draws players into the story.

Finally, Koei is setting sail with *Uncharted Waters Online*, a total world sim with an emphasis on

historical naval operations. Traders can set sail anywhere from London to Lisbon and make a fortune on the high seas.

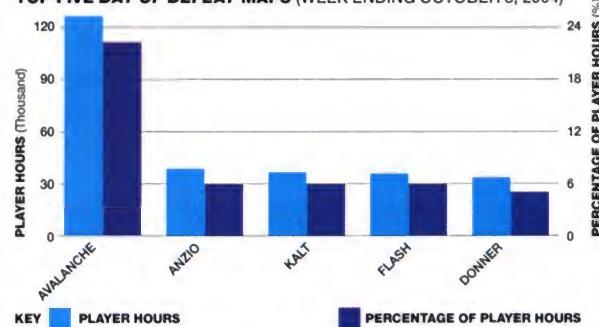
All games are due for 2005 releases in Japan (with beta tests prior to launches), although confirmation of Western availability remains hazy across the board. However, the support shown to *FFXI* by both the US and the European market can only be a point in favour of getting them released.

STATZONE

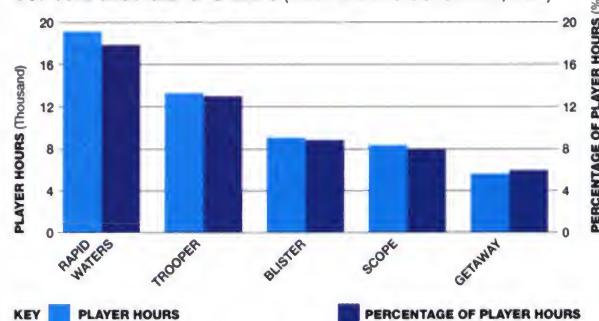
A LOOK AT THE DATA SHAPING YOUR ONLINE WORLD

ALL DATA
SUPPLIED BY:
CSPORTS.net

TOP FIVE DAY OF DEFEAT MAPS (WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 8, 2004)



TOP FIVE TACTICAL OPS MAPS (WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 8, 2004)



TOP TEN DAY OF DEFEAT PLAYER NAMES (WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 8, 2004)



No Contest!



Now you can enjoy state-of-the-art PC gaming with a Hyundai ImageQuest TFT display engineered specifically with high-end gamers in mind.

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GamersEurope.com, 11/2004

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HYUNDAI
HYUNDAI IMAGEQUEST



Drug usage was definitely on the increase at this year's Glastonbury festival.



Makes the Wicker Man look normal.

Look who's orcing...

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Without a peon in sight, **Rhianna Pratchett** is left to fight her own battles...

SEEING THE Warcraft franchise grow up is rather like watching the progression of a precocious child. In the original game, it was a chubby orcish toddler, in Warcraft III it was a brooding adolescent and finally, with *World Of Warcraft*, the game's turned into a grown man – and one who has more than one saucepan and puts the toilet seat down.

So it was kind of inevitable that there'd be an online version of Warcraft – what better way to experience Lordaeron or

Kalimdor than by running around in them, battleaxe at the ready and fury codpiece rippling in the breeze? So step this way and I'll take you on a short tour. Stragglers will be left behind (and possibly eaten by a slavering beast).

WOW (best acronym ever) gives you eight races to choose from. First, there are the Horde factions which comprise of trolls (the big angry guys), orcs (the big,

angry green guys), tauren (half-man, half-bull, unlikely to get invited to dinner parties), and the undead (tendency to lurch a bit).

Or, if you prefer your character to be a bit more 'traditionally' shaped, you might want to look into the Alliance instead. That's where you'll find humans (the conservative choice), night elves (if you think yourself stylish and misunderstood),

and not forgetting the little guys – the dwarves (small angry guys) and gnomes (smaller, angrier and a terror to kneecaps from the Tirifal Glades to Stranglethorn Vale).

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Blizzard Entertainment
PUBLISHER VU Games
WEBSITE www.blizzard.com/wow
ETA Winter 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Eight Horde or Alliance characters, with nine available classes.
- Explore a vast seamless world inspired by the Warcraft RTS games
- Easy to get into for both casual and hardcore MMORPGers
- Dedicated PvP servers
- In-game postal and auctioneering facilities



"Once again... The foot bone's connected to the leg bone..."

TAKE YOUR PICK

However, it's not just about shape, it's what you do with it. So be prepared to take your new creation down the path of the paladin, rogue, priest, hunter, warlock, druid, warrior, mage or shaman.

Not all these classes are on offer to just anyone, though. For example, only taurens, trolls and gnomes can be a shaman – and believe me, it's not wise to make jokes of the 'garden ornament' variety when one of those little buggers has got a lightning bolt handy.

Each character starts in their homeland (humans



Q&A

CHRIS SIGATY



WOW's producer Chris Sigaty talks about the game's quest system...

PCZ So tell us how questing will work in **WOW**?

SIGATY The quests are one of the strongest aspects of **WOW**, and like many of the other features, they're very assessable. You start off pretty much pointing at the first guy you need to talk to, and he then guides you on your way.

PCZ Will each race have their own quests?

SIGATY Yes, and the quests are very varied with a lot of detail. If you paid attention in the *Warcraft* RTS games, you'll see some familiar storylines cropping up.

PCZ Such as?

SIGATY In *Warcraft III*, you see a cinematic about Arthas, son of the King of Lordaeron, who, while in a psychotic rage ends up killing his father. In **WOW**, the undead inhabit that area of the Eastern Kingdoms and when you go there, you can see the ruined city, the throne, the fallen bell, everything. It's really cool!

CV



BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT

Briefly called both Chaos Studios and Silicon & Synapse Inc, Blizzard has a raft of titles that speak for themselves...

1994 Warcraft: Orcs & Humans – where the fight between humans and orcs began.

1996 Diablo – the ultimate RPG hack'n'slash is born, and it hasn't been bettered.

1998 StarCraft – Blizzard's third franchise is still one of the most popular online RTS titles.

2002 Warcraft III: Reign Of Chaos – Warcraft goes 3D, with an in-depth storyline and a rekindling of the age-old battle.

"Hold on lassie. I just needs to help mah friend in the next screenshot..."



Better than Adam and the Ants in their heyday.



Is that Siegfried or Roy?



Destiny's Child's tour of Sellafield had some unwelcome side effects.

"Don't make jokes of the 'garden ornament' variety when one of those little buggers has got a lightning bolt handy"

themselves with considerably more of their blood on the wrong side of their skin. If you're looking for a fight however, there are PvP servers for people like you.

COME FLY WITH ME

The producer behind this virtual land, Chris Sigaty, offers these wise words: "With many MMORPGs, after you create a character it's not very clear what you're supposed to do next. The main goal with **WOW** was to make it very easy to get into. We have an in-game help

system and a simple interface, but it still has a lot of depth for hardcore players."

So whether you're a hardened MMORPGer or just a casual dabbler, **WOW** has something for you. Perhaps you'd like to hone your useful professional abilities, which include things like skinning, leatherworking, herbalism and alchemy. Alternatively, instead of high adventure, perhaps you dream of becoming a blacksmith or a fisherman, spending your time peacefully casting a line or two?

The stables provides the last leg of our tour, although we're not talking horses

here. Griffins are just one of several creatures in the game that fly you from area to area – although take care not to surprise it from behind as those things have a mean kick... Hold on tight too, because fallers will not get a refund!

As you see the land dropping away beneath you, you might notice there are no loading screens and no darkness. Instead, you can sit back and enjoy a seamless ride through these colourful landscapes. Lush woodlands give way to parched deserts, that in turn slowly merge into treacherous mountain ranges heavy with snow.

From the air, *Warcraft*'s world is a tranquil one; a beautiful idyll of breathtaking scenery. On the ground, it's a violent, adventurous wonderland of thrills, all tied together with a spot of Blizzard polish. We'll see just how well it hangs together in a few issues time. 

begin in the woodlands of Elwynn Forest, for instance), and they're free to wander wherever they like on the regular servers (as long as they behave). But woe betide the Alliance adventurer who ventures into Horde territory and starts to cause trouble, as they'll find



EVERQUEST II CHARACTER CREATION

WIN A COPY OF
EVERQUEST II

With the launch imminent, **Paul Presley**, **Jamie Sefton** and **Will Porter** prepare their adventuring alter-egos ahead of time...

YOU KNOW what it's like. You've waited breathlessly for months as the release date draws near. You've conjured images of epic quests and derring-do in your mind as you've gazed longingly at the screenshots in our previews. You've dreamt about how you're going to shape your in-game alter-ego once the launch date hits and your subscription activates. But until then, you're trapped firmly in the world of your imagination, no access to the realities of *EverQuest II*'s character creation tool.

Well, until now you were...

Nestling snugly on

our jam-packed DVD this month is everything you need to bring your adventurous avatars to virtual life. The happy-go-lucky team at Sony Online Entertainment has given us the complete *EverQuest II* character creation tool, containing everything you need to create the hero or heroine of your dreams and prepare them for life in the newly-shaped Norrath.

The powerful tool lets you adjust everything from your general race to the shape of your eyebrows. From the length of your body to the width of your nose. From the colour of your eyes to size of your 'fro.

The best news is that once you've got your characters exactly the way you want them, you can store them away ready to jump straight into the world of *EQII* once it launches (and once you buy the game of course).

To give you an idea, we let three of the *ZONE* team loose on the software and told them to let their imaginations run wild. As you can see, they didn't run very far. In fact, we're so sure you can do better that we want you to send us a screenshot and short biography of your own creations. The one we like best wins a full copy of the game itself!

Send your

mighty warriors, spooky wizards and, er, hairy cat-type people to: *EQII* Character Competition, PC *ZONE*, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP. Closing date is Wednesday December 8. Only one entry per person. For full terms and conditions, see page 7. **PC**



JAMIE SEFTON (ASSOCIATE EDITOR)



"For some reason, I'm drawn towards the Ogre. Probably due to their size, strength, no-nonsense attitude and extremely short fuses. Anyone who's heard me on the phone ranting to my gas supplier will agree it's an ideal match."

"First step – the hair. My own great hairstyle disaster of 2004 can be neatly summed up with this semi-african number. I never let it grow that far though. I wouldn't be seen dead in the nightclubs of Skirpenbeck with that on my bonce."



WILL PORTER (NEWS WRITER)



"In my capacity as ace newshound and cub reporter, I need to be intrepid, daring, and blessed with an ability to ferret out information from anywhere. Closest match seems to be a Halfling. Plus, he matches my physical dimensions..."



"Piercing blue eyes I think – sure to impress the ladies. Midget ladies anyway. I see myself as a sort of hyperactive Sancho Panza to Sefton's misguided Don Quixote, so I need to shape my facial features to reflect that eagerness."

PAUL PRESLEY (ONLINE EDITOR)



"Personally, I think a strapping, muscle-bound warrior suits me best. But everyone else thinks I should go for a more wizened, crotchety old magic user type. They're probably right, the cheeky beggars. Let's go for a standard Human."

"Naturally, I don't get out much in my job as *ZONE*'s leading virtual world correspondent. So the skin colour has to be paler than an anaemic tapeworm. The eyes need to reflect my true intellectual (some would say shifty) status too."





"Not sure about those fangs. We Seftons are famed for our pearly white choppers the length and breadth of East Riding. Plus, the forehead's looking a bit low. You don't get to be as good at *Pro Evo* as I am without a bit of nous."



"Almost there now. The complexion needs to reflect the lack of sun in the dales of Yorkshire. Plus, you won't catch me with any of the poncey face furniture. Real men don't wear earrings. That's about it. Seftonator lives. Canny."

"OK, so I'm looking more scared than eager. Still, it does kind of sum up how I feel every time I get Jamie's tea wrong. Better change the eyes to look more sympathetic for when things get hairy. Speaking of which, sideburns..."

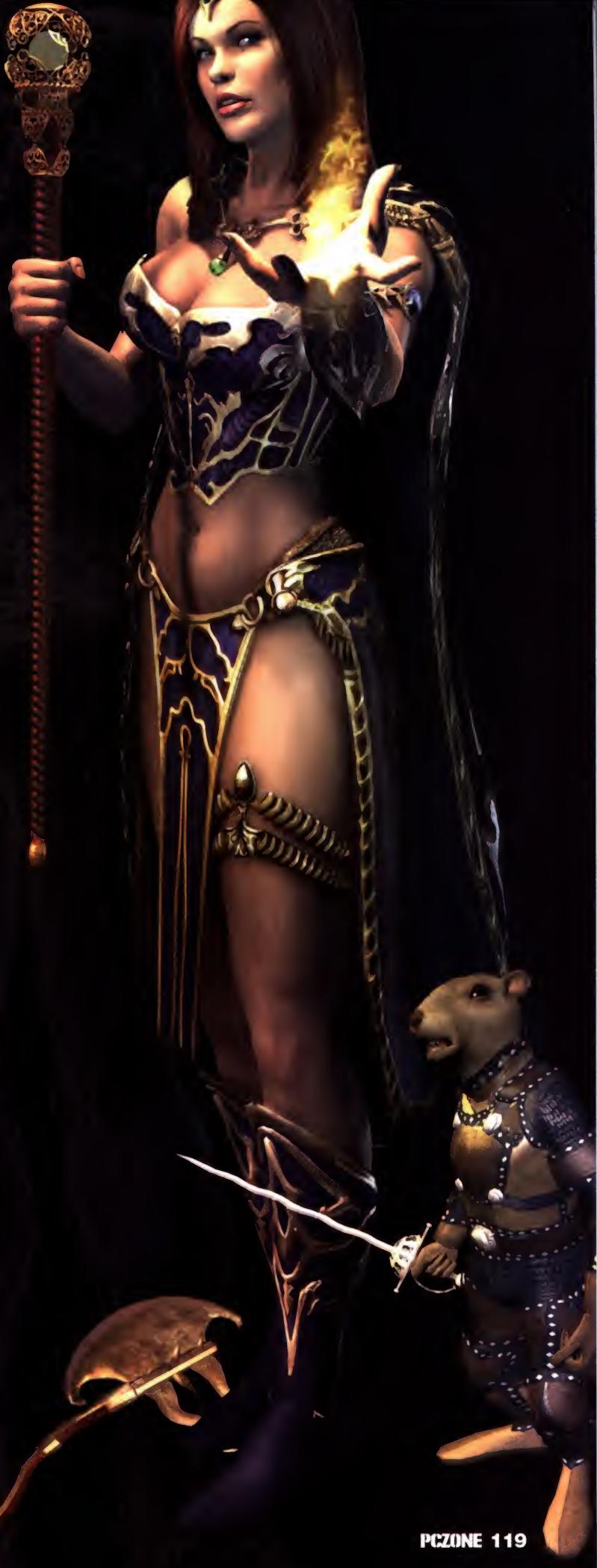


"The clothes are a pretty good match for my collection of fading game-branded t-shirts. Although my clothes aren't that tattered just yet. Now, a name... Ah, yes. Say hello to Short Round (copyright issues pending) – gopher for hire."



"Ideally, I'd keep my locks ginger and luxurious, but as the years pass the old Grecian 2000 is more present. Might as well cut my losses and let the grey shine out. Looks more distinguished anyway. Don't fancy that bald spot though."

"Years poring over games has resulted in a malnourished, frail physique, so it's emaciated cheekbones, a thin hawk-like nasal protuberance and a prominent forehead to store all that knowledge of obscure 8-bit text adventures."



FIGHTCLUB



FIRST RULE OF FIGHT CLUB: PC ZONE OWNZ JOØ

FIGHT CLUB MODERATORS: METALFACE, REX MUNDI & GOWERLY

Most. Players. Ever! Last month's *Joint Ops* event was a cracker. We began wondering if we'd even have enough players to get a decent game, but as the night went on, our 150-player server continued to fill up, topping off at a highly impressive 118 by the time

we called it a night. We were even briefly the most populated server on Novaworld (International), attracting players from as far afield as France, Sweden and even Florida!

■ Plenty of star names this month (as you'd expect), with strong showings from the STS and AA clans (step forward Breaker, Fury, iou and hag in particular), along with individual contributions from XXTOKERXX, The Swordsman, Djinn-IRÉ and perennial ZONE combatant G_Man_007.

■ Due to circumstances beyond our control (er, Christmas), Fight Club will be taking a four-week break at the end of December. Juggling mince pies and

machine guns at the same time is just too much for us to take, so we'll need some time to get back into training. The mayhem resumes on Thursday, January 27 with a

Players' Choice event. In other words, we're throwing the game selection over to you.

We'll be running a poll on our Web forums in which you can vote for your favourite game. We'll bring you the results next month, so get voting!

■ We're also still looking for requests for UT2004 mods to host on our public servers. If there's a total conversion that's a particular favourite, or one you've always wanted

to try but never had a chance, let us know at online.zone@pczone.co.uk and we'll look into hosting it. We're here to make your online gaming life easier!

■ As always, to take part in Fight Club, or to find the connection details for all our public game servers, aim your Web browser towards www.zonegames.co.uk for all the info you could ever need. Lock and load, soldier!

**COME &
'AVE A GO!**
www.zonegames.co.uk
for all the info

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Getting up close and personal with the readers.



Prezzer gets a lift from G_Man_007.



The PC ZONE jolly boys' outing takes a turn for the worse.

UPCOMING FIGHT CLUB EVENTS

THURSDAY DECEMBER 2

6.30pm - 9.00pm

Counter-Strike: Source

THURSDAY JANUARY 27

6.30pm - 9.00pm

Players' Choice

WHO'S WHO

Jamie Sefton	NorthernScum
Paul Presley	Prezzer
Will Porter	Batsphinx
Suzy Wallace	Uzibat
Stu Bishop	Banzai
Anthony Holden	Shokupan
Jamie Malcolm	JimLad
Martin Korda	Nameless One
Phil Wand	People's Front of Judea
Michael Filby	Parallax
Andrew Taylor	Druski

ZONECHAT

GAMES-PLAYERS SHALL SPEAK PEACE UNTO GAMES-PLAYERS



TECHNICAL gremlins bedecked the first ZONE Chat to be held from our new home in Future Towers (London). Things started brightly enough, with Prezzer and Will being joined by ZONE freelancers Rhian Pratchett (the gaming guru herself), Phil 'Wandy' Wand and Michael Filby (both regulars in #pcz, even outside of ZONE Chat hours).

Naturally, the *Half-Life 2* review garnered interest, despite Will's attempts to drag things around to his trip to Skywalker Ranch. However, it was Prezzer's elaborate attempt to organise an IRC 'treasure hunt' compo that ended up overloading our systems and causing our connections to be fouled up. Apologies for the truncated session. Red faces all round and a promise that it will never happen again. Probably.

**WEDNESDAY
DECEMBER 1
5PM - 7PM**

Our next get-together, the last before the Christmas break, is on Wednesday, December 1, usual time, usual place (that's 5pm-7pm in the #pcz channel on the Quakenet IRC server). By this time, we should have our technical gremlins sorted and we're looking forward to a barnstorming Christmas

Special, in which we'll be talking about what gaming-related prezzy you want, how you're spending your holidays and hosting our usual games, competitions and madcap mayhem.

Taking part in our cosy, fireside chats couldn't be easier if we came round to your house in person. You need a decent IRC program (we recommend mIRC - from www.mirc.com). Log on to the irc.uk.quakenet.org server, type /join #pcz and you're sorted. There you'll find hundreds of like-minded ZONERS eager to welcome you...

LAN ROVER

STEVE 'SCALPER' RANDALL GETS OUT OF THE MISERABLE WEATHER AND ENJOYS THE LAN-SCAPE

■ www.hgian.co.uk is holding its final event of the year in Mile End on December 3-5 at £20 for the weekend. Carnage is guaranteed.

■ www.thefragfactory.co.uk is in the Barnsley Community Centre on November 20-21. These guys have it well organised and have a few LANs planned at regular intervals, so you know what and when it's all going to happen. £25 for a weekend, or £15 for a day. Fun either way.

■ www.hub-lan.com is being held in the two conference rooms on the 12th floor of the Grosvenor Hotel in Sheffield. The event runs on November 20, from 10am-10pm. Not only does the hotel have its own car park, you can get a lift up without having to use the stairs - a result for the 21" monitor crew.

■ The University of Essex's Multiplayer Gaming Society is having its second short event from

December 3-5. Get down now and see if you could stand the smell of the 5-day event coming up. Details at www.mgsoc.co.uk/index.php. You will need to be a member to get the very reasonable £15 ticket for the whole event.

■ www.moongames.co.uk is hiding away from 7pm on November 26 for 48 hours of pure gaming. £30 for the whole thing and an early sign up guarantees your seat.

■ Just as I went to press Lansupnorth got in touch to mention that Lansupnorth 10 will be December 10-12, 20 places, £10 for a day, or £20 for the weekend, come see more at www.lansupnorth.co.uk.

■ If you want your party to feature here drop me a line, with at least two months advance notice, the details of numbers, costs and location at scalper@ggian.co.uk. Scalper out.

GUILDHALL



▲ YOUR FIRST STEP ON THE ONLINE GAMING LADDER

What better time than Christmas to start making new friends in the world of online gaming? New PCs, new games, new horizons. Whether you're looking to find an existing group of *Battlefield* players to join, or hoping to start a MMO guild of your own, Guildhall is the place to find your destiny...

CLAN MAG (More than Averagely G00d)
CONTACT magspiderwebmaster@fastmail.co.uk

WEBSITE magician.atspace.com

MAIN GAMES *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*, *UT2004*, *Call Of Duty*

DETAILS We're a new but highly active Clanbase-linked multinational clan. We play games every day and have at least twice-weekly clan wars on Clanbase. To join, you must own one or more of the games listed and be 'More than Averagely G00d' at it. Email me (magspider) or apply at the forums and/or Clanbase.

CLAN Twisted Unreal Fraggerz ||TUF||

CONTACT silk@clantuf.com

WEBSITE www.clantuf.com

MAIN GAMES *Unreal Tournament (Instagib)*, *Age Of Empires: The Conquerors*

DETAILS We're a worldwide clan, looking for UK/European members (English-speaking). No obnoxious behaviour, no cheating, must be dedicated, active and fun to play with. We have two servers located in the US and we're starting a UK/Europe division.

CLAN -JEP- Elite Para

CONTACT See website

WEBSITE www.elite-para.co.uk

MAIN GAMES *Call Of Duty*, *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*, *Battlefield Vietnam*

DETAILS We're good and need some fresh blood to fill up our squads. You must have Gamespy and at least one of our games to join. Please look for -JEP-[Nirvana]-Cf- on Gamespy!

CLAN 114th

CONTACT da_mic_153@hotmail.com

WEBSITE www.114th.co.uk

MAIN GAMES *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*, *Call Of Duty*, *Joint Ops*, *Battlefield Vietnam*

DETAILS The 114th have been around for what seems like an eternity and are bigger and stronger than ever before. We're looking to enlist players for the BFV squad. If you have what it takes, fill in an application. WE WANT YOU!

CLAN Order of the Silent Death <OSD>

CONTACT riad50@hotmail.com

WEBSITE www.orderofsilentdeath.com

MAIN GAME *Star Wars Galaxies*

DETAILS We're a very established and mature guild, looking for more like-minded gamers who enjoy giving payback to the empire. Ideally, you need to be over 15 as we run a Teamspeak server and the action can be intense.

CLAN [RaBiD]

CONTACT bloodlustian@hotmail.com (or via the forum)

WEBSITE www.rabid.150m.com (mature content)

MAIN GAME *Call Of Duty (Heat Of Battle mod)*

DETAILS We're a small clan that mainly play HOB, but we plan to expand into vanilla COD soon. We're looking for players of all levels from all over the world. We use a program called X-Fire to see who's playing and Yahoo! Messenger is needed, so add us after visiting their site.

To feature in Guildhall, send your details and 50 words describing your group to online.zone@pczone.co.uk (subject line: GUILDHALL) or to Guildhall, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP.

PCZONE READERS' CHALLENGE



Your chance to prove your leet skillz and reap the rewards

ROUND TWO of the PC ZONE Readers' Challenge is now complete and what a frenzied mass of frags it proved to be. Our three tournaments were 1v1 and 2v2 *Doom 3* deathmatches and a whopping 10v10 clan-based *Battlefield Vietnam* league.

Top prizes in the *Doom 3* events went to the two-man team of Gavin "Sabotaj" Hillin and Elliot "AtomicJam" Goode who took on the Dutch might of Stefan "MaDd0G" Timmermans and Mark "Raydenz" van de Tol in the final. The Dutch pair had already defeated two of Hillin and Goode's clan mates in the semi-finals and it was this impetus that spurred the pair on to a 41-33 victory.

Sabotaj also featured in the 1v1 final, only this time on the losing end as he went down 16-4 to Jonas "PooH" Bengtsson from Sweden.

The *Battlefield Vietnam* league featured six teams of ten players each with eventual winners PvP.bfv romping home undefeated in all matches. Clan [MPG] gave them their closest run in game four, with a final score of 445 to 115.



Congratulations to everyone who took part and we hope the lucky winners (Surely 'skilful' – Ed) enjoy their fabulous prizes courtesy of our tournament sponsors.

Fancy your chances? The good news is that Round Three is about to commence with 2v2 games of *Doom 3* plus 5v5 matches in both *Day Of Defeat* and *Counter-Strike: Source*. Meanwhile Round Four is on the horizon which will include team match-ups in the newly released *Joint Operations: Escalation*.

All the details of the PCZ Readers' Challenge, including upcoming rounds, match results and a forum to leave messages with your fellow competitors, can be found by simply heading to www.pczone.jolt.co.uk.

The winners of each round will receive a veritable treasure trove of hardware and peripherals as generously supplied by our Readers' Challenge sponsors. What more could you ask for? Great prizes just for playing games. Sign up today and win, win, win!



The *Battlefield Vietnam* tourney was a whitewash. Clan PvP.bfv we salute you.



Round Three shifts the battlefield to WW2 with ten-player *Day Of Defeat* action.

READERS' CHALLENGE IS PROUDLY SPONSORED BY THE FOLLOWING COMPANIES



The V9950 series from leading graphics card manufacturer Asus takes GeForce FX performance to a whole new level. www.asus.com



The XMS product line is Corsair's premium desktop product family and the world's most highly awarded memory. www.corsairmemory.com



Creative's Sound Blaster Audigy 2 ZS soundcards and the Inspire T7700 speakers produce superior audio for gamers. www.creative.com



Logitech raises the bar in gaming precision and performance with the MX 510 mouse and Internet Navigator SE Keyboard. www.logitech.co.uk



A worldwide leader in the motherboard industry, MSI's K7N2 supports the latest AthlonXP and Duron processors. www.msicomputer.co.uk



Plantronics USB headset with DSP (digital signal processing) and maximum bass response – enhanced for gaming. www.plantronics.com



The WD Raptor is a new class of hard drive that matches SCSI reliability and performance. www.westerndigital.com



The home of Online Gaming, Jolt provides services from basic Quake clan ports to managed corporate game server solutions. www.jolt.co.uk

RESULTS

DOOM 3 – DEATHMATCH 2v2

QUARTER-FINALS

INSANITY & SLUDGE	10-46	SPITFIRE & POOH
TYBALT & XHEP	18-19	ATOMICJAM & SABOTAJ
VORV & CJM	57-8	AN4RK1 & JECKAL
MADDOG & RAYDENZ	42-27	RAGE & STORM

SEMI-FINALS

SPITFIRE & POOH	0-1	ATOMICJAM & SABOTAJ
VORV & CJM	32-44	MADDOG & RAYDENZ

FINAL

ATOMICJAM & SABOTAJ	41-33	MADDOG & RAYDENZ
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WINNERS: ELLIOT "ATOMICJAM" GOODE & GAVIN "SABOTAJ" HILLIN

DOOM 3 – DEATHMATCH 1v1

QUARTER FINALS

AIM	4-5	SABOTAJ
SLAYER	4-7	MADDOG
STRIKOR!	17-1	CARMA
TEXMEX	0-12	POOH

SEMI-FINALS

SABOTAJ	6-4	MADDOG
STRIKOR!	0-10	POOH

FINAL

SABOTAJ	4-16	POOH
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WINNER: JONAS "POOH" BENGSSON

BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM – 10v10

FINAL LEAGUE POSITIONS

TEAM	PLAYED	WON	DRAWN	LOST	POINTS
PVP.BFV	5	5	0	0	15
[MPG]	5	4	0	1	12
::BR::	5	3	0	2	9
{SAS}	5	2	0	3	6
[FYM]	5	1	0	4	3
.:B2R:	5	0	0	5	0

WINNER: PVP.BFV



E-SPORTING LIFE

All the latest news from the wide, wide world of professional gaming. Your man at the E-Sports desk – **Philip Wride**

WE START this month with the GameStarsLive event in London and the EOGL competition. Five days of mayhem saw tournaments being played in Counter-Strike, Call Of Duty, Warcraft 3, C&C Generals and Unreal Tournament 2004 and it was stiff competition all-round. With many European teams and players in attendance it was the British new boys Supermen who walked away with the 5,000 Euro prize for finishing first overall, with 4Kings taking second place. Finnish outfit Destination Skyline claimed the top C-S honours.

On the other side of London the World Cyber Games UK qualifiers were under way and the Counter-Strike competition was washed aside by Team-UK who bagged themselves a spot in the WCG Grand Finals in San Francisco. These took place at the beginning of October and unfortunately none of the UK representatives fared well. In the end USA powerhouse 3D snatched the crown by beating Danish team The Titans in an overtime thriller, while hot favourites SK-Gaming finished

in fourth, behind unexpected Korean Bronze medallists Maven. When all was said and done it was the Netherlands that sat atop the medal chart. Attention now turns to 2005 as the Grand Finals loom in Singapore.

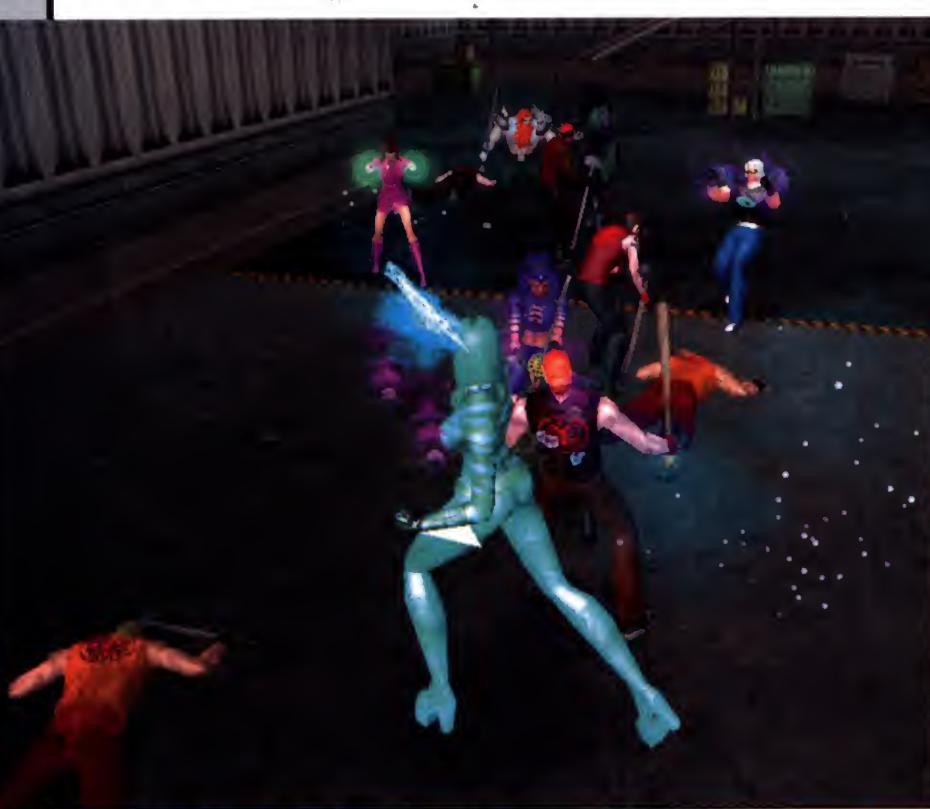
The CPL has confirmed *Doom 3* will not be the game of choice for the 2005 World Tour and that *Painkiller* will be played instead. The decision was made following extensive talks with *Painkiller* developer People Can Fly, which has committed to providing competition additions to the game in the form of an HLTV equivalent for spectators as well as netcode tweaks. The CPL also announced it is considering shifting its *Doom 3* tournament at CPL Winter to a World Tour qualifier for *Painkiller*.

An announcement was also made by the CPL with regards to qualifiers for the CPL Winter competition and the good news is that there will be a qualifier hosted in the UK. GameFrontier will once again play host to the event.

See you next month with more from the world of E-Sports.



The once-dominant 4Kings had to settle for second-best at EOGL.



Frostella and her super-friends show a warehouse of bad guys what-for.



Just a typical day at the PC ZONE office.



"Eat teleported gas bottle you scum!"

CITY OF HEROES

■ £29.99 (plus monthly subscription, first 30 days free) | Pub: Cryptic Studios | Dev: NCsoft | ETA: Out Now | www.cityofheroes.com

REQUIRES PIII 800, 256MB RAM, a 32MB 3D card and a 56k modem

DESires P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, a 64MB 3D card and a broadband Internet connection

With great power comes great responsibility. Which is why we don't let Paul Presley wear spandex in the real world

BEST. Character creation system. Ever. It's more important than you might think. Sure, everyone wants a good-looking superhero image and the wealth of options available to you in *City Of Heroes* puts every other MMOG to shame. But it's more important than just deciding the visual impact you'll make (be it expertly crafted famous hero knock-offs –

Wolverine, Daredevil, The Incredible 'Ulk, etc. – or well thought through originals like my own Doctor Gravitus). It's important because it shows that NCsoft have taken this concept seriously.

This could so easily have been *EverQuest* in spandex. A traditional, bog-standard, MMORPG in superhero clothing. All the usual basic character types, the familiar rat-killing level grinding, the same basic detached combat, the same XP

the superhero game of your dreams. The moment that first bolt of lightning shoots from your eyeballs into the gutt of a ne'er-do-well, or when your razor claws slide from betwixt your fingernails with a satisfying 'snick', or when you see your first higher-powered hero suddenly leap into the sky and gracefully tell gravity to get stuffed as they continue to rise higher and higher, the moment you play witness any of those seminal superhero moments,



yourself. Your mighty battles are recounted in the most exacting detail to anyone that will listen. It's a glorious world where every prospect pleases and only man is vile. Men and annoying, buzzy robot things called Sprockets. And aliens. Mustn't forget the aliens.

But then, a month or two after starting, something I like to call the NCsoft Factor hits and things start to go wrong.

CLOBBERIN' TIME

Anyone who's had experience of either this or NCsoft's other MMOG-in-waiting – *Lineage II* – will probably have noticed the

same thing.

This isn't a

company that

particularly specialises in the 'deep' MMO experience. *Lineage II* we'll cover next month, but much like that land of swords, sorcery and skimpy clothing, *City Of Heroes* plays its best hand early on and as a result finds itself lacking when the whist game of life reaches its later rubbers.

Levels one through 12 are exhilarating. New powers open up almost every other day, from simple laser eye blasts to the seriously warped likes of Propell, in which a dimensional portal is

IN PERSPECTIVE

PLANETSIDE

Reviewed Issue 131, Score 82%

Planetside is similar to COH in that it's a fast-action, combat-based MMOG featuring people wearing bright clothes, but that's as far as it goes. This is real-time FPS action taken to a logical conclusion.

ANARCHY ONLINE: ALIEN INVASION

Reviewed Issue 148, Score 77%

Another MMOG that specialises in dressing up in silly outfits and running around in big cities, although in a far more traditional MMO sense. Recent updates have also seen an alien threat emerge.

"The moment you fire that first bolt of lightning will leave you grinning from ear to ear"

to reward ratios. And while, yes, underneath all the primary colours and knockabout fun, all clichés are present and correct, you're generally so busy having a stress-free blast that you barely notice.

City Of Heroes is deceptive like that. Initially you're playing

you're left grinning from ear to ear and confidently proclaiming that *City Of Heroes* is the finest game ever to be coded.

And boy how you proclaim it. You proclaim it to anyone and everyone. You proclaim the hell out of it. It's impossible to keep your tales of derring-do to



"Taste the slap of justice, evil-doer."



The Human Shocker proves less than effective.

opened and a random object is sucked through and hurled towards your enemy (anything from fire hydrants to old sofas). Each bad guy encounter and instanced mission is ripped straight from the pages of Marvel, with thugs, villains, zombie armies and aliens all waiting for healthy doses of justice from Spineder-Man And His Amazing Friends (sic).

LIBERTY FOR ALL

In fact it'll take you about two weeks (at an hour or two per day) to get to a level that seems reasonably impressive, at which point one or two piranhas of doubt start to nibble at the paddling toes of contentment in the tropical sea resort of playability.

Suddenly you're blithely ignoring all the petty crimes happening all around you as the protagonists are too low a level for you to bother with – something that breaks the immersive qualities that being a

superheroic defender of the weak and innocent was bestowing upon you until now. The comic book heroes of our youth would happily stop any mugger, help any cat in a tree and aid any old woman to cross a road, however powerful their muscles and shiny their cape. No deed too small for them.

For you however, resplendent in your level 15 finery, the crime-ridden streets are just really, really inconvenient. That woman screaming for rescue from a terrifying



Furious, and blue, it's Blue Fury.



Supreme heroes act as trainers, dispensing new powers as you level up.



Character creation is ripe with possibilities.

gang with lasciviousness on their minds will just have to fend for herself. You're far too important to be foiling such low-level crimes like that. Hold fast, fair damsel, a less experienced hero will be along shortly to protect you.

Worse still, should you opt to clean the streets Batman-style of all crime, you'll be shouted at by the lower-level heroes for 'XP stealing'. It seems the class barriers in hero-world are alive and well.

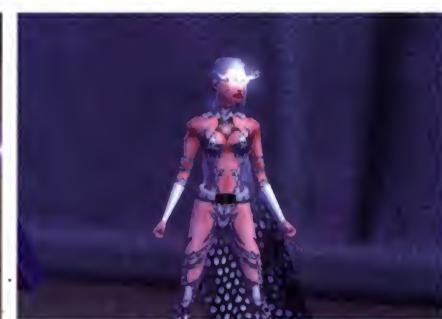
OK, a certain gaming licence has to be taken. But there are worse issues than this. Repetition rears its head like an ugly old man rising for the fifth

toilet trip that night. Early on you start to realise that COH is little more than a blastathon, leaving little scope for characterisation or social development.

CRIME NEVER SLEEPS

Superteams can be formed and high-level characters can add prefixes to their sobriquets or gain access to capes, but there's none of the socialising depth seen in most MMOs. Just log in, fight a bit, level up, log out. A more literal case of 'Wham! Bam! Thank you ma'am' we've yet to see in gaming.

That's the moment when the clichéd MMO mechanics surface like a stricken submarine of



You'll catch a chill in that, love.

limitation in the ocean of possibility and the emperor realises the people are pointing at his hairy crown jewels rather than his imaginary new threads. And it's the point when most COH players decide to go back to the drawing board and create a new character. That's the dilemma you see. *Heroes* is all about its early game. Character creation is excellence itself and experimenting with the hundreds of power set combinations is rather thrilling.

But for the game to retain an audience beyond its free subscription month (and for NCsoft to start seeing real profits), it needs to have a worthwhile sense of direction added. Something for the fledgling heroes to be aiming at in the months after pulling on their tights for the first time. Certainly, the game deserves to succeed, as it's obvious Cryptic Studios wants to take the concept of a superhero MMO seriously. But until it does expand, *City Of Heroes* is merely the best start of a game we've ever seen. 

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Superb character creation
- ✓ Fast and furious action with all the superpowers you've ever wanted
- ✓ Best realisation of superheroes in a game to date
- ✓ Technically solid
- ✗ Repetitive
- ✗ No long-term appeal (as yet)

77

Holy potential, Batman



MMORPGing in a winter wonderland.

THE SAGA OF RYZOM

■ £29.99 (plus £8.49 monthly subscription, first month free) |
Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Nevrax | ETA: Out Now | www.ryzom.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D card and a 56K modem

DESires P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB 3D card and a broadband Internet connection

Having spent ten years getting closer to nature to prepare for this review, Paul 'Organic' Presley finally relented and had a wash

IT'S ALWAYS good to have a plan. Witness the difference between the sprawling, unco-ordinated, badly thought-through mess that is our ongoing incursion into Iraq. Compare that with the tightly controlled, intricately detailed assaults of the Roman Empire, where no option was left unexplored and every conceivable tangent was identified and taken into

account. Shame about all the Imperial incest and patricide that came with it, but you can't have everything.

Yes, plans are great, in a having-an-overall-idea-of-what's-going-on kind of way. Which is why I had such high hopes for *The Saga Of Ryzom* – an eight-year MMO adventure in a detailed alien world, where the designers had mapped out what was going to happen at every step of the way, and in which the players would feel genuinely connected to the events. Plus it had a totally believable ecosystem, in which weather, seasons and time all play a part in how you behave, in which the animals have their own food chain and interaction rules, and in which the planet itself is revealed as a giant living plant, reacting to the players' actions. Sounds brilliant. What went wrong?

FIRST THE BAD

To say that *Ryzom* is a HIDEOUS FAILURE OF GIGANTIC

PROPORTIONS might be overstating the case somewhat, but I can see why not everyone has tuned in to Nevrax's high-brow concepts. Mostly, people are being put off because, when you get down to it, *Ryzom* isn't finished yet. I've not been privy to the exact inner workings of the French developer's financial make-up, but there doesn't seem to be any visible reason why the game has been rushed through like this.

Netcode has yet to be optimised, meaning that wherever you connect to the (single) server, with whatever type of connection, you're in for a laggy experience. Documented in-game elements – such as the personal encyclopaedia or racial divergence – haven't been included. Placed traders have nothing to sell. Animation is distinctly ropey in places (the instant sit/stand transitions are laughable). Simple delivery quests are confusingly arcane in terms of telling you what to do.

There's no theme tune or music of any kind. Seriously, who launches a game and then promises to add the theme music in a later patch?

The list continues, but ultimately it all leads to the simple, undeniable fact that *Ryzom* needed about half a year's extra work and beta testing done to it before it was unveiled to the public. And the really, really, really annoying thing about it all is that we, the public, would have been happy to wait for it, because underneath all the unpleasantness, there is an absolutely superb game waiting to happen.

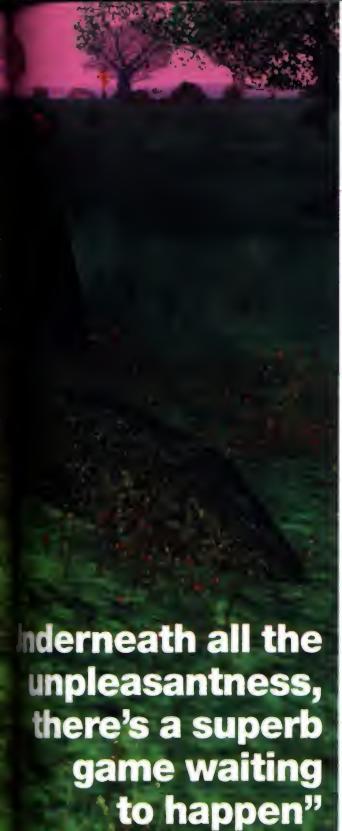
THEN THE GOOD

The aforementioned plan is set to see the game world of Atys expanding, evolving and drastically changing, as the storyline events kick into gear and the true role of the players takes shape. The visual style of the world is a joy to behold, and certainly feels different to



Ow! Bloody nature.





"The set for Alien is over there."



"Ow, my head feels like it's burning."



"What you might call 'killer good looks'."

Underneath all the unpleasantness, there's a superb game waiting to happen"

anything seen before – the huge roots of the world arcing overhead, the changing seasons and weather patterns giving each visit to the world a different feel (and even affecting game mechanics – certain resources are better harvested in certain climates, certain spells work better in certain environments, etc). The natural wildlife behave as you'd expect animals to – herbivores roaming in packs searching for fertile land, carnivores tracking them and picking them off. One of the great pleasures to be

had is when being chased by a wild beastie, leading them towards a larger pack of plant-eaters and

watching them switch their attention to the more easily killable prey.

The system used to create spells and actions is an interesting idea, letting players break things down into their component parts and reshape them as they see fit. It's limited at first, but as you reach the higher levels and more advanced options open up, you really get a feeling of personalisation about your character.

NOW THE FUTURE

So, does *Ryzom* have a future? By the time you read this *Nevrax* should have released Patch One, which addresses a few of the stated problems. Moreover, Patch Two is already in the works and includes things like the encyclopaedias, quests, player mounts and development of the story. Until then I can't in all honesty recommend you give *Ryzom* a try, as you won't be experiencing the game as it should be played (and even then it's likely to need more work if the lagging issues aren't sorted).

However, even if/when *Ryzom* is fully working, it's still going to pale in comparison to the upcoming twin behemoths of

World Of Warcraft and *EverQuest II*. These are two games that, even in their beta stages, are getting it right. They ooze playability and have such a sense of self-assuredness about them that you can't help but be drawn into their worlds.

Ryzom is different, to be sure. It has many fine concepts. The action/spell customisation, the eco-system, the setting, the crafting. All of these are fine ideas that warrant attention. However, it's extremely doubtful whether they're enough in themselves to be worthy of a monthly subscription.

I can only hope it does pay off for *Nevrax*. I've often been a champion of the different, hailing innovation above polish, and for *Ryzom* to disappear from the radar entirely would be a shame. Simply for being set somewhere other than the typical swords and sorcery fantasy worlds already lifts it a notch or two. Plus the overall plan that the team has for the world of Atys could be something very special to be a part of as a player. I'd recommend giving *Nevrax* six months or so to see if it can get the actual mechanics of playing the game to be more enjoyable. Fingers crossed. **PCZ**



"And you thought vegetarianism was good for you."

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Original concepts and settings
- ✓ Working eco system
- ✓ Component-based skill system
- ✗ Missing features
- ✗ Needs at least another six months of polishing
- ✗ It's laggy

62

Come back later



"Whoa, I gotta lay off them vodka potions..."



"Oooh, look at all the pretty snowflakes!"



EVERQUEST: OMENS OF WAR

■ £19.99 (available as download only) | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Sony Online Entertainment | ETA: Out Now | www.omensofwar.com

REQUIRES PIII 450, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D card, Internet connection and a full copy of EverQuest (with active subscription)

DESIRABLES PIII 1GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D card and a broadband Internet connection

Max Donnelly ignores the omens and dives back into Norrath

YOU CAN'T solo in EverQuest – so goes the conventional wisdom. But after the release of *Omens Of War*, the three hundred thousandth expansion for the popular MMO (all right, the eighth), it's a truth that may have altered. Or has it?

The most significant contribution of *Omens* to the EQ universe is its new task system. Sony Online wanted to offer more solo content, so it created convenient multipart activities that you could jump into during your lunch hour, get the job done, gain XP, cash, enjoy a cyber-moment, and jump out. Good idea, right? Like the Star Wars Galaxies mission terminals, these activities are supposed to be short, sweet, and to the point, but many of you will find that your concept of short and sweet is pretty far removed from Sony's. Many of the tasks take a lot longer than a lunch hour... or

even two. And some of you will swear that you can't get through them in any amount of time without your cleric (unless you are a cleric – trying to perform the miracle of healing thyself before spellus interruptus). Nonetheless, there is a lot of content here, much of which does indeed fit the bill, so players of varying levels, all the way through level 70, can now stop whining about never having the opportunity to solo.

THREE SCORE AND TEN

Level 70? Yes, the expansion also kicks up the level cap, so all the 65s who've been sitting on their hands can now toil their way into über-ness once again. Some of you, in fact, did it in 15 minutes by ignoring *Omens* and going direct to the Plane Of Fire.

The thing about *Omens*, though, is that it does a lot of small things extremely well, and

some of them may even be a bit transparent. While its graphical improvements completely outshine what we saw in *Gates Of Discord*, it's still no *EverQuest II*. The visuals don't actually hit you hard unless you're really scrutinising, but the new particle effects (water is hugely improved), real-time shadows, and other enhancements do enrich the atmosphere. Unfortunately, this comes at the cost of framerate, except on higher end machines. Also, your "ON ME,"-esque and other inspired macros are now audible to your party (and OK, that's a bit lame, but it does come in handy when folks are not looking at the dialogue channel).

"You'll find that your concept of 'short and sweet' is pretty far removed from Sony's"



"I'm afraid to say these are the improved graphics."

While *Gates Of Discord* was packed full of extremely high-end content, *Omens* is much more accessible. Players in their upper 40s should find plenty to do and best of all, they'll find it all immediately available, without having to jump through frustrating and often arcane hoops to gain access to new

areas. Plus the new Epic quests and Alternate Advancement Abilities can add a lot of variety to your class-specific lifestyle.

All in all, the expansion helps *EverQuest* continue its role as opiate to nearly half a million mesmerized fans, whose long-term love affair with the game keeps them subscribing from month to month. Predictable it may be, but most EQers would have it no other way. 

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ It's handsomer than before
- ✓ All freely accessible
- ✓ Not strictly aimed at high-end players
- ✗ Tasks take too long
- ✗ Many tasks are (or feel) unsolvable
- ✗ High level players will get better exp elsewhere

81

Not quite the full solo solution, but still great



"Taste my paintbox of doom!"



"I love what you've done with the place."

INPERSPECTIVE

DARK AGE OF CAMELOT: NEW FRONTIERS

Reviewed Issue 149, Score 80% *DAoC*'s most recent expansion, while not nearly as stacked with content as *Omens Of War*, is at least free and is equally at home with players of all levels.

CITY OF HEROES

Reviewed Issue 149, Score 77% The superhero MMO of choice has recently added capes and aliens to the fray in Paragon City, but still lacks the depth of an *EverQuest*.

DARK AGE OF CAMELOT: NEW FRONTIERS

■ Price: Free download | Pub: Wanadoo | Dev: Mythic Entertainment |
ETA: Out Now | www.camelot-europe.com

REQUIRES PIII 450MHz, 128MB, 384MB RAM, 32MB 3D card, Internet connection, full copy of *Dark Age Of Camelot* (with active subscription)

DESIRABLES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D card, broadband or cable Internet connection



All along Camelot's watchtowers, with Max Donnelly and a bunch of hostile Vikings



"No, don't mind me. I'm just a myrmecologist."

EXPANSIONS are the lifeblood of most massively multiplayer games, and Mythic's *Dark Age Of Camelot* is no exception. However, the latest add-on for the Medieval-themed fantasy RPG, *New Frontiers*, differs a little in its pricing policy: it costs nada. That's right, it's free.

In this case though, you'll be pleased to know that 'free' doesn't mean 'crap'. Instead, you get a complete revamping of the game's already excellent player versus player system, known in the *Dark Age* world as

Realm versus Realm, or RvR. The realms – the English Albion, the Norse Midgard, and the Celtic Hibernia – are locked in perpetual combat over some 12 frontier zones.

What *New Frontiers* does is radically change the dynamic of the battle for those zones. Every map is new – crossed by waterways, dotted with castles, towers, bridges and gates. Combat now revolves around control of key fortifications and chokepoints, instead of trains of players traipsing about wondering where the hell everybody else is.

A new mapping system gives you a quasi-real time update of where the battles are and who controls what, making coordination of attacks and defences much easier. Plus, a teleportation system, dependent on control of a chain of friendly towers, removes one of the worst flaws in the old system – that of

having to spend more time running to the battle than actually fighting it.

SPOILS OF WAR

The main reason to fight other players in *Dark Age* is to gain realm points, which eventually lead to realm abilities, which in turn mark the difference between powerful (read 'alive') and the less powerful (read 'dead') players. *New Frontiers* makes it easier to garner these laurels, with special awards for defending and attacking keeps. Even corpses, provided they did something worth rewarding before their untimely demise, can benefit.

Along with the new award system comes new abilities, and in fact, the old realm ability system went completely out the window with this expansion. The results are mixed. Some classes, namely ranged and magic classes, gain marvellously. Others, notably



"I knew I should have brought my step ladder..."



Magic users feel the real benefits this time.

IN PERSPECTIVE

EVERQUEST: OMENS OF WAR

Reviewed Issue 149, Score 85%
EverQuest's latest add-on offers more graphical upgrades and more non-PvP content, but it's even more focused on high levels and of course, it isn't free.

CITY OF HEROES (ISSUE 2: SHADOWS OF THE PAST)

Reviewed Issue 149, Score 77%
Another free expansion, this one adds capes, new missions and a new alien threat for the superhero MMO. More of an extension than an expansion, really.



"Warriors are passé and casters are all the rage"

the original *Dark Age* client – *New Frontiers* is a steal at, well, zero cost.

For new players, coupled with Mythic's new 'free level a week' program, the new battlegrounds offer some incentive to start anew, but low participation on most servers makes this problematic. If you have existing high-level characters, it's a must-have. **PC**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Free
- ✓ Great siege warfare
- ✓ More rational realm abilities
- ✓ Low level content
- ✗ Melee classes hosed
- ✗ Battlegrounds under populated

80

Free and fun, but also unbalanced

COMMUNITY CHEST

THE SIMS

When is a game not a game? When it's a sim. Daniel Emery looks at ways to extend his (and your) virtual life

It's sold more than 6.3 million copies across the globe, overtaking *Myst* as the best-selling game of all time, and consistently clogs up gaming charts across the globe. Who would have guessed that small could be so beautiful?

No matter what we think of it, it's obvious that the rest of the world has fallen for *The Sims* in a big way. And if you fancy spicing up your virtual world with some of the best mods, skins and add-ons available, here are eight of the best places to look. Your journey to an altogether fancier world starts here...



THE SIMS RESOURCE

(ADD-ONS)

www.thesimsresource.com

There's a veritable mecca of Sims-related goodies on this site: skins, heads, animals, objects, walls... You name it, it's probably here. The only downside is that you have to register before you can download anything. But given it doesn't cost you a penny, it's not a huge headache to do so.

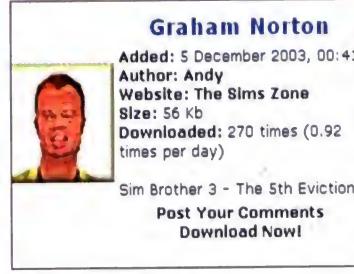


SIM BOX

(CHARACTERS)

www.simsbox.com

Normally we're not big fans of French websites – especially when they put the Stars & Stripes as the icon for English... However, this one is worth a mention because of the *Hello*-esque nature of its downloads section. From the Osbournes to Angelina Jolie, there's something to keep any celebrity watcher happy.

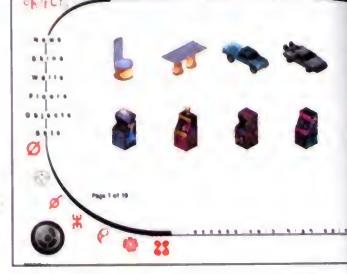


THE SIM ZONE

(WEBSITE)

www.thesimszone.co.uk

We admit we're somewhat biased towards the UK community, and The Sim Zone shows just how good a fansite we Brits can produce. From its easily navigable file system through to the high-quality screenshots, this isn't only one of the best Sims sites about, it's also a model for all others to aspire to.



SEVEN DEADLY SIMS

(FURNITURE)

www.7deadlysims.com

Despite having the world's corniest title, there are quite a few unique goodies hidden in this site. It doesn't have the vast range of The Sim Zone, but it does have items that we've not been able to find elsewhere – coin-op arcades, art nouveau lamps and a '70s hi-fi to name but three.



THE NUDE SIMS PAGE

(SKINS)

www.adultgamereviews.com/nudesims.shtml

Some people like their sims to be anatomically correct, and others have more nefarious requirements. Be that as it may, this link not only removes the pixel-blurring that occurs when your little sims jump in the bath, but gives them proper bits downstairs too. Enjoy...

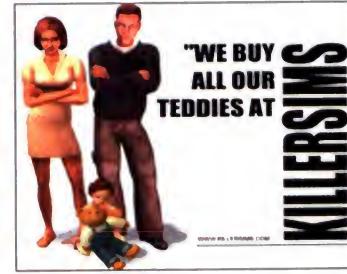


THE FAT SIMS

(SKINS)

www.fatlaneonline.com/goodies.html

Bringing pc to your PC is The Fat Sims. Kiss goodbye to slender figures and say hello to Big Mama, replete with bulging gut, size 28 dress and thighs that wouldn't be amiss on an elephant. For the full skinny (ahem) on making your sims more rotund, roll over to its download section.



KILLER SIMS

(ADD-ONS)

www.killersims.com

This has to be one of the most imaginative add-on sites. Click here, and you can make your characters pee yellow, customise the TV channels to real-time viewing and cut down on loading time. What's more, it's all in the guise of a huge shopping mall and certainly takes the award for imaginative design.

STEVE HILL'S NEVERQUEST

Steve Hill experiences the final fantasy that never ends



ELEVEN? That's hardly ***ing final, is it? (Thanks to 'Ye Olde Games Industry Book of Jokes' for that one.) Suffice to say I've never seen any of the previous ten, nor have I ever had any inclination to do so. However, with options running thin, the frankly stupidly named world of Vana'diel awaits. And wouldn't you know it? It's only on the brink of war, as three powerful nations rally their troops against the beastmen in a desperate bid for survival (I'm not reading this). Apparently, brave adventurers like me are Vana'diel's only hope. No pressure, like.

And what makes them think I'm brave? I'm actually a physical coward who crumbles in the face of fear. Not really the world-saving type. As if to prove the point, I am Hillick, an androgynous-looking elf-type, who in a well-ordered society would be beaten to within an inch of his life should he so much as step out of the house, or cave, or tree stump, or whatever elves live in.

FOUR-MINUTE WARNING
Before my inevitably doomed attempt to save the world, I am met with a

chilling warning: 'A word to our players. Exploring Vana'diel is a thrilling experience [I'll be the judge of that]. During your time here, you will be able to talk, join, and adventure with many [some] other individuals in an experience that is unique to online games [looks like the same old fiddle-dee-dee nonsense from where I'm sitting]. That being said, we have no desire to see your real life suffer as a consequence [that's very kind]. Don't forget your family, your friends, your school, or your work [I wasn't planning to, and besides, this is my work].'

With the official warning duly noted, it's off to Vana'diel we go. Portentous voice-over alert, as somebody sounding like Tom Baker in *Little Britain* announces that "it all began with a stone..." I didn't catch the rest, but it sounded very dull indeed.

Wading straight into East Sarutabaruta, the first 'person' encounter is Bozack. He's about 5'8", quite stocky, with a thick white tail. He doesn't have much to say for himself, but does treat me to a selection of lilting tunes on his ornate

harpsichord. I don't know if he's after money or what, but out of politeness I feign interest for a good 15 seconds before leaving him to it.

AMERICAN IDIOT

Making my escape, I wander straight into a conversation, with Rizor congratulating Tigraa and Tigress on their pending marriage, which is apparently taking place in three weeks.

"What, for real?" I enquire, but I never do get an answer, as the intended husband and wife hold hands and disappear in a flash of colour. The chat has attracted the attention of Darklegend though, who immediately starts mocking my ignorance.

"Are you new? You seem a little lost," he asks. "Yeah, pretty new," I reply, at which point he starts waving his arms about and encasing me in a prism of light. "What are you doing to me?" I bark. "Huh?" grunts Darklegend. "Have you just put a spell on me?" I shout. "I'm not doing

anything," he laughs. "Boy, you sure are new."

He then casts a Protect spell on me and brags, "That time I did" before scoffing "Are you OK, dude?" "What have you done to me?" I scream, flailing wildly at invisible demons.

"You look as lost as a mo-fo," smirks Darklegend. "Alright, keep your wig on," I implore the increasingly annoying, and clearly American, twat.

ONLY JOKING

There's no let-up though, and he seems to be having the time of his life, guffawing, "You don't even have your weapon equipped. I'm laughing my ass off." "Well," I counter, "I'm laughing my ass off at you playing some gimp's game. Get a job." "I've got a job, playa," claims Darklegend, "Chill dude, I'm not trying to offend you. It happened to all of us at one point." Rapidly losing patience, I find myself whining pathetically: "I've only been

here ten minutes and I'm already a joke."

In fairness, Darklegend shows me how to equip my sword, and helpfully suggests that I kill small animals. With renewed vigour, I set about a nearby Bumblebee, smiting the airborne pest with a swing of my mighty weapon, at which point I'm rewarded with a pot of honey (it might have been easier to nip down to Lidl). Now that I've got some idea of something I'm meant to be doing, I embark on a frenzy of insecticide. A few more bees bite the dust, followed by a Tiny Mandragora, which fills me with a poignant yet indefinable sense of remorse.

Snapping out of my guilty reverie, I ask Stagolee for a go on his Chocobo, but he ignores me (bastard) so I head towards the river. Still buoyed by my killing spree, I attempt to decimate the aquatic life, recklessly taking my sword to a River Crab. Within seconds I am dead. Same as it ever was... 



"What's with the crazy harpsichord, dude?"



"Keep your wig on," I implore the increasingly annoying, and clearly American, twat

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HARDWARE

ALL THE LATEST NEWS AND REVIEWS FROM THE WORLD OF PC HARDWARE

COOKING STUFF



■ HARDWARE EDITOR Phil Wand

▲ I've been trying to like AOpen's weeny XC Cube PC, but it's a difficult task. The premium model is based around AOpen's own UX915G motherboard, featuring the latest Intel 915G chipset with Socket T connector, PCI-Express x16, four SATA ports, integrated LAN plus onboard video and 5.1 audio. There's not a lot else you could squeeze inside a PC measuring just 320x200mm without pushing it through a trash compactor first. On paper, the XC Cube is a really hot idea.

It's really hot on my desk, too. When I assembled the machine, I wasn't convinced by the heat compound on the base of the copper tower – it was the colour and consistency of putty, and although protected by a tear-off strip of plastic, it had what looked like a fingerprint in the middle of it. I looked at it the same way you might regard dog jam on your shoe, but remained open-minded.

You guessed it. Within a short space of time, the BIOS reported a CPU temperature of 70 degrees, a system temperature of 42 degrees and a fan speed of nothing. Had I left the power connector on? No. Turns out the 'smart' control in the BIOS was hindering the fan, meaning in some cases the processor was hitting 74 degrees before the blades began rotating. Can't be right.

Thinking a BIOS update might help things, I ventured onto the AOpen website – a confusing, glacially slow place full of contradicting product names and numbers, none of which make any mention of the UX915G motherboard. A best-guess download for the 915G made the 'smart' control a little brighter, but the CPU remained cooking in the high 60s. And I think I know why. Once the fan kicks in, all hell breaks loose. I have to lean back into the chair. Spittle is wrenched from my mouth, and I can hear bricks jostling behind my billowing wallpaper. If I'd designed this turbocharged garden vac, I too would have it kick in only when absolutely necessary.

SPEED KILLED

Intel confirms its fastest processor has been axed, AMD responds with FX-55

With Intel concentrating on features rather than fastness, AMD's monster FX-55 should hog all the limelight.

DESPITE BANGING the speed drum for more than a decade, the world's largest chip maker has canned all plans for a supercharged Pentium variant, and has admitted that it won't be taking consumers over the next speed barrier and beyond – not for at least a year.

Having been late to follow recent trends in chip technology, such as multi-core design (see 'Many Hands, Light Work', right) and 64-bit, Intel has become keen to shift focus from cranking up the power to turning out new features, much like rival AMD. An internal memo stated that the company would be changing direction towards what it termed 'end-user benefits', listing enhanced security, multi-tasking, mobility, manageability and reliability. Instead of bringing the 4GHz Prescott to market, the memo continued, Intel would instead be introducing large-cache CPUs and would be starting work on dual-core designs.

TWO HEADS

Only very recently we reported that Intel would be making the move to 64-bit, having pooh-poohed the idea for some time. The news that it will be introducing dual-core processors for its desktop,



mobile and server products in the summer of 2005 is just as unexpected. AMD demonstrated its dual-core 940-pin Opteron a couple of months back, and as with its 64-bit range, hopes to be first to market. Right now, the dual-core design means little to gamers, but once developers learn to take advantage of the twin set-up, it should provide some significant performance gains.

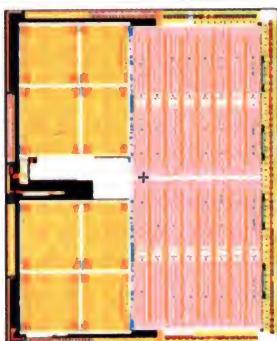
No sooner had Intel made its announcement than AMD launched its fastest processors ever, the AMD Athlon 64 4000+ and the Athlon 64 FX-55. The former is likely to be clocked

around the 2.4GHz mark, and the latter, with its dual-core memory controller, around 2.6GHz. Since its launch in September 2003, the flagship FX-53 has been a true giant-killer, regularly outperforming the Pentium 4 Extreme Edition in gaming-oriented benchmarks. The new FX-55 is reckoned to be 8 per cent faster than the now obsolete FX-53, and although Intel is likely to hit back by launching the Pentium EE with 1066MHz front-side bus, it should stretch out AMD's lead in the high-end desktop segment even further.

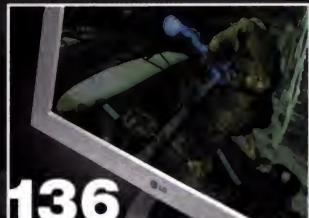
MANY HANDS, LIGHT WORK

AMD has talked of multiple cores in its processors ever since the launch of the AMD64, but why? What do they do? At its most simplest, the idea is that two processing cores, each with their own unique memory cache, are able to deal with more information at any given moment. The end result is a faster and smoother turnaround of data, and thus a faster and smoother machine.

Intel introduced its Hyper-Threading (HT) technology to try and give the benefit of two cores inside a single core product. If you've used a recent Pentium you'll see two processors listed in Windows. However, although effective, it's not as effective as a true dual-core set-up.



AMD's blueprint for its dual-core chip. Intel has shifted design focus to keep up with its more innovative rivals.



136

REVIEWS

LG's new Flatron is a real player



137

REVIEWS

3DMark05 Pro on test



138

DEAR WANDY

You ask, he replies



142

BUYER'S GUIDE

What should you buy next?



This is for you if you can't find the W, S, A or D keys without looking down.

GLOW GAMING

New Saitek 104-key keyboard perfect for late night Half-Life

DESIGNED TO enhance your skills in low-light conditions, the Gamer's Keyboard features a programmable command pad, sleek titanium look, plus blue LED backlighting. Not just any old blue LED backlighting though, but a proprietary system which Saitek had to license from the patent holder.

The super exclusive illumination is controlled through a toggle button on the top of the main keyboard, offering high, low and off, and the command pad is controlled through software which enables you to reprogram individual keys. Although the mystic blue glow is likely to attract case modders and children under the age of five, the real reason this keyboard will sell is Saitek's legendary build quality. Its joysticks are second to none in terms of ergonomics and solidity, and if the keyboard has the same hewn-from-granite feel, it should sell well.

BROADBAND FOR OHM USERS

USA first, UK next?

Companies on both sides of the Atlantic have dabbled with broadband over power lines, but with the Federal Communications Commission approving a set of rules designed to limit interference, the concept is sure to take off. The hope here is that the action of the FCC may prompt more power companies into using the idea of Net access through the power grid. Southern Electric is the only ISP to offer a narrowband Powerline Communications service now, starting at £20/month and going up to 1Mbps. Plus, Southern's connection is symmetric – your upstream and downstream bandwidth is the same. www.southern-electric.co.uk

WHEREFORE ART THOU, RADEON?

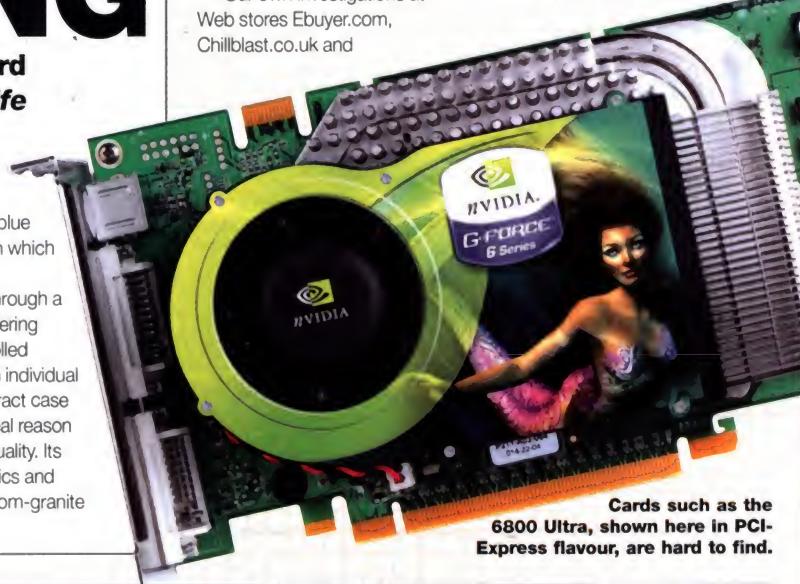
You might feel the need for speed, but high-end cards are thin on the ground...

SOURCES ON the Web

have revealed that a shortage of G-DDR3 memory, as seen in the GeForce 6800 Ultra, 6800 GT, Radeon X800XT Platinum Edition and X800XT, is causing problems for ATI and NVIDIA. High-quality RAM for high-end boards is in such short supply that it's almost impossible to find products using it at retail.

Our own investigations at Web stores Ebuyer.com, Chillblast.co.uk and

Overclockers.co.uk, revealed that most G-DDR3 products are on order. On the ATI side, Ebuyer.com's range embraces Sapphire, MSI, Connect3D and ASUS, yet not a single product was in stock. The NVIDIA situation was a little better, but most of the GTs and Ultras were marked as 'out'. Sadly, we're not hopeful that the problem will be resolved in time for Christmas.



Cards such as the 6800 Ultra, shown here in PCI-Express flavour, are hard to find.

SNIPPETS

FATAL BLOW

We reported last month how Johnathan 'Fatal1ty' Wendel challenged Londoners to a game of *Doom 3* deathmatch. £10,000 was on offer to anyone who could beat him, but both the champ and ABIT's prize fund survived unscathed. Clearly overwhelmed at his performance, ABIT upped the prize money to £70,000 – the largest cash prize ever offered in a single gaming event – and flew him to China to battle the country's top players atop the Great Wall. A lucky fellow by the name of Meng 'RocketBoy' Yang managed to beat Mr Wendel, winning a PR job at ABIT and the equivalent of 25 years salary. Fatal1ty said: "I think another match against RocketBoy is in order."



MORE PODS

Having dropped the price of its Digital Jukebox (DJ) iPod competitor to under \$150, Dell has released an iPod Mini competitor called the Pocket DJ. The 5GB slimline device has a nine-hour battery life and will be launched in the US very shortly. The retail price is expected to be around \$200 (about £110) for the 5GB version, and \$250 (about £140) for the 12-hour battery, 20GB version. Whether Dell's players will be able to take a bite from Apple's business is not clear. The Mac maker announced this month that 150m songs had been downloaded from its online store, making iTunes one of the biggest brands in music, and HP has recently agreed to resell iPods.



TOUGH TIME FOR LCD

As warned in previous issues, sales at key LCD manufacturers are still dropping. The TFT-LCD division at Samsung Electronics revealed that profits have dropped by 72% on sales that were already 23% poorer than the previous quarter. LG Philips has also announced its profits are down by almost a third. The problems stem from an oversupply of 19-inch or larger TFT screens, and customers holding onto their CRTs and banking on LCD price cuts. Investment firms such as Merrill Lynch and JPMorgan have expressed concern over the TFT LCD market, hinting at oversupply into 2005 and a price cut at the end of the year.



DRIVER WATCH



Need a patch? Take a look to see if you're behind the times

MOTHERBOARD

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Intel	INF Update Utility	6.0.1.1002	7-May-04	1.5MB	support.intel.com
NVIDIA	Forceware	5.10	17-Sep-04	26.8MB	www.nvidia.com
VIA	Hyperion 4in1	4.53	16-Aug-04	1.4MB	www.viaarena.com
VIA	Hyperion Pro 64-bit	0.99 Beta	06-Aug-04	2.7MB	www.viaarena.com

GRAPHICS

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
ATI	Display, Control Panel, WDM	CATALYST 4.1	14-Oct-04	26.2MB	www.ati.com
NVIDIA	Forceware	61.77	27-Jul-04	12.0MB	www.nvidia.com

SOUND

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Creative	Audigy 2 ZS Driver Update	1.84-50	29-Jul-04	16.6MB	uk.europe.creative.com
M-Audio	Revolution	1.0.2.8	13-Feb-04	10.16MB	m-audio.com



FLATRON L1730P

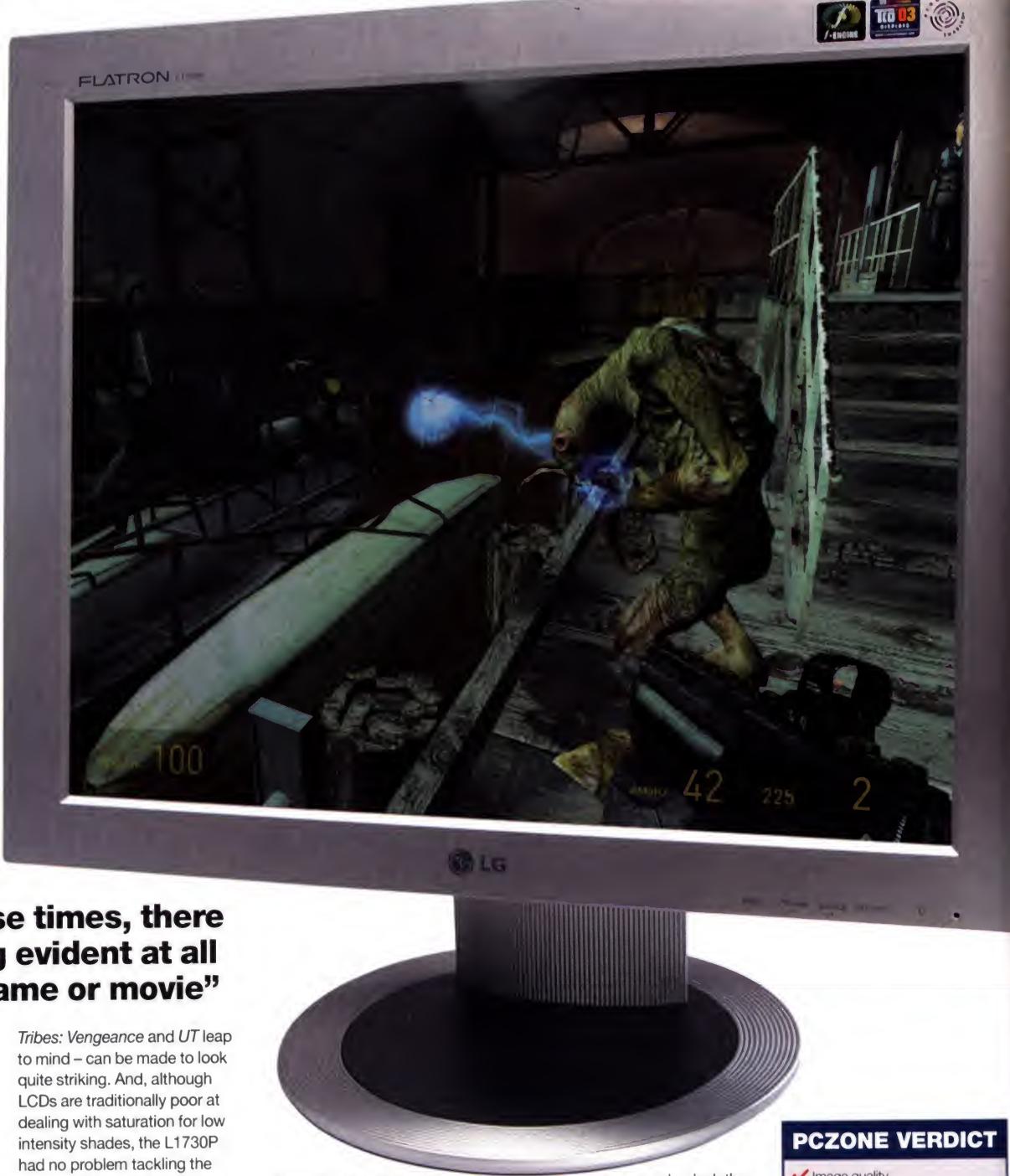
£310 | Manufacturer: LG Electronics | Phone: 0870 607 5544 | uk.lge.com

The latest Flatron can rise, fall, swing and pivot, but can it play?

LCD MONITOR

ASIDE from a few small grumbles, the L1730P is pretty much perfect. As with any display bearing the TCO-03 accreditation, the LG features both height and tilt adjustments, a large viewing angle and predefined colour settings which change the character of the image at the touch of a button. The 'movie' preset gives a much warmer picture, less bright but richly saturated, which as the name suggests is ideal for gaming and watching DVDs. The 'text' preset is bluer, crisper and more contrasted, and is better suited to reading and writing. You can also define your own; after all, everyone's eyeballs are different. Buttons for these options, a source switch and traditional on-screen menu, are tucked underneath the lower edge of the panel and are presented in line with your fingers. This makes them unconsciously easy to use and leaves the front looking very uncluttered. Rear connections are housed beneath a sliding door, making access to them quick and easy, and the two port USB hub is detachable.

In terms of picture quality, the L1730P is manifestly better than either the Hitachi CML174SXW or its L1710B predecessor, both of which were previous Buyer's Guide winners. The Swedish TCO accreditation mentioned



"As for response times, there was no blurring evident at all in any action game or movie"

earlier demands that the image is uniformly sharp and bright across the entire display area, and here the LG's superiority is marked. Colours are vibrant everywhere you look, and depending on which preset you choose, some of the more stylised action games – *XIII*,

Tribes: Vengeance and *UT* leap to mind – can be made to look quite striking. And, although LCDs are traditionally poor at dealing with saturation for low intensity shades, the L1730P had no problem tackling the gloom of *Doom 3*.

FAST AND FURIOUS

Although there has been much debate over response times, and it's certainly a factor that preoccupies games players, the 12ms quoted in the Flatron specifications seems quite valid. There was no blurring evident at all in any action game or action movie, and although a CRT remains a considerably faster option with typical response

times of under 1ms, flat panel displays such as the L1730P are plenty quick enough. They're also brighter, clearer, easier on the eyes, and kinder on the environment – an old 15-inch CRT consumes twice as much power as a 17-inch LCD.

There is one major downer though – the relatively high price. For the same money you could buy an Iiyama Vision Master 513 and enjoy a whopping 22 inches of glass real estate – even if you

need a desk the size of the USS Nimitz to go with it. And for almost £100 less, you could opt for the Iiyama ProLite E434S, which is a more dated design, but still a 17-inch LCD with 14ms response.

What it boils down to is LG's premium quality picture, wide range of adjustments, superior ergonomics, and plain good looks. If those things matter to you, the LG is the one to go for. You won't regret it.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Image quality
- ✓ Response time
- ✓ Highly adjustable
- ✗ Wide bezel
- ✗ A touch pricey
- ✗ Pivot a gimmick for gamers

91

The ideal screen, if you can stretch to it



It may look exciting, but the latest 3DMark is in fact remarkably dull.

3DMARK05 PRO

■ \$19.95 (download), \$29.95 (CD-ROM). | Developer: Futuremark | Phone: +1 408 517 9020 | www.futuremark.com

On your marks, get set... Bench!

THERE can't be a gamer on the planet who hasn't used 3DMark at one time or another to see how their system measures up. More than 30 million copies have found their way onto PCs around the globe, and despite the program being little more than a contrived 'best guess' of gaming prowess, 3DMark remains the currency of overclockers everywhere.

Since the introduction of 3DMark99 six years ago, the

benchmark has become increasingly complex, embracing transform and lighting, multitexturing, vertex shaders and pixel shaders, with the polygon count rising in each release. In 3DMark03, Futuremark stopped using Remedy Entertainment's MAX-FX Technology, the engine behind Max Payne and prior 3DMark versions, and chose a much leaner, proprietary code base. They were criticised for

that move, and 3DMark05 sees the company introducing an all-new engine designed to mimic the way games actually work.

The biggest change for the average user is minimum requirements. As if teeny-weeny 3DMark05 scores won't depress you enough, the benchmark now demands a DirectX 9-compatible card with 128MB on board. At bare minimum you'll also need a 2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and Windows 2K or XP. Ouch.

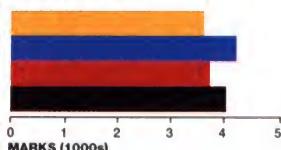
3DMark05 Pro includes CPU tests, plus fill rate, pixel shader and vertex shader tests, and you gain free access to the Pro Online ResultBrowser (ORB). But since the vast majority of people will use the free download as a single-pass benchmark to produce a score they can compare with friends, my criticisms will be levelled at that.

HEAD CRABS

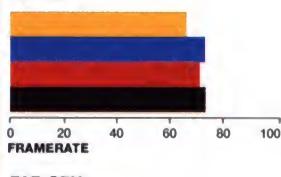
The very first thing that struck me was how 3DMark05 was going to eat my brain. Unlike 3DMark03 or 3DMark2001, there is precious little energy in any scene. While Canyon Flight

BENCHMARKS
■ Radeon X800 Pro
■ Radeon X800 XT P.E.
■ GeForce 6800 GT
■ GeForce 6800 Ultra

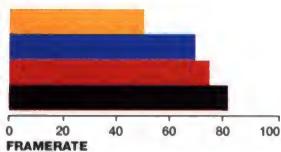
3DMARK05 PRO



DOOM 3



FAR CRY



displays some genuine creativity, overall the tests are drab and lifeless. The camera often lingers too long on shots, and except for the close-up of the airship captain's features, you're left feeling removed from the action. Compound this with jagged lines, texture issues and moiré patterns, and the default test – the one which gives you a score – is very disappointing. When you consider the horrendous minimum specs, it would have been nice to see some of the complex geometry sacrificed for a better quality, and when you remember that 3DMark05 fails to reflect results from the likes of *Far Cry* and *Doom 3*, you begin to wonder what the point is.

While 3DMark05 can be a fine test of new hardware and rendering technologies, and it does highlight how the previous generation of video cards will quickly become obsolete, its image quality is questionable and its scores exaggerate minor differences in performance between cards. Use it if you must, but remember where results really count – in the games you play. **PC**

TESTED TO DISTRACTION

3DMARK05 TAKES YOUR PC TO FAMILIAR TERRITORIES AND SOME OF THEM ARE VERY PRETTY...

1ST TEST

RETURN TO PROXYCON

A continuation of the second test from 3DMark03, Return To Proxycon is a first-person mock-up set in the docking bay of a cargo ship. It features eight directional lights, each casting dynamic shadows and reflections on various metallic textures.



2ND TEST

FIREFLY FOREST

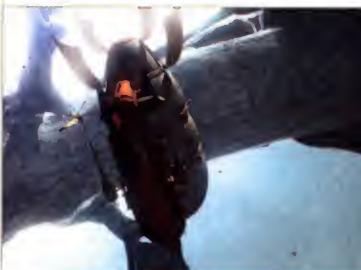
Lots of trees and vegetation here, the latter's position and complexity altered dynamically depending on the location of the camera. The lighting and shadows are really impressive, and the dark surroundings give the scene a mystical feel.



3RD TEST

CANYON FLIGHT

A large area with a single light source. The water reflects the sun and surroundings, its rippled surface rendered with depth fog to make the creature within appear as though it's haunting the depths. Imaginative and exciting, yet the quality is suspect.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Instant results
- ✗ Increasingly irrelevant
- ✗ Looks ropey in places
- ✗ Boring

69

Just like the score, it's getting a little sucky



DEAR WANDY

Processors, Microsoft, shopping dilemmas and RAID arrays – how can one man know so much? Whatever your problem, don't sit there moping – Wandy's sure to have the solution...

■ THE KNOWLEDGE Phil Wand

LET IT ALL OUT

Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us and in turn, we may well share them with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in type thing. If you have any **top tips** to share with the group, then send them in too: if Wandy's impressed, he'll print them and send you £50 for your trouble.

Write to Dear Wandy, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP.

Email Address your letters to us at wandy@dearwandy.com with the subject heading 'Dear Wandy'. Please note: while we can assure you that we read absolutely every techie query sent to us, we're unable to offer personal replies. Sorry.

Huw Jones

GRASS IS GREENER

Q I've taken your advice and bought an Abit IC7, but I'm confused by all the different Pentium processors. I've gone for a 3.0GHz with 1MB of cache for no other reason than the bloke on the end of the phone said it was the one to have, even though it's not one I've seen mentioned in the magazine. I contacted Abit, who say the 3.2 is up to 25 per cent faster, but I may have a problem with the board if the BIOS isn't up-to-date. Would I be better off with the cooking version, or is it not worth risking the BIOS problem?

Huw Jones

A The IC7 is a good board. It's getting rather long in the tooth now, the core model having been launched over a year ago, but it remains cheap, abundant and stable, and various flavours cater for any palate. The IC7-MAX3 has every Abit trick up its sleeve, including OTES, SecureIDE, FanEQ, ThermalGuard, TweakGuard, SoftMenu and FlashMenu, plus more besides. It's also one of the best-looking boards available. At launch, it was the company's flagship product and for a home gaming rig, it's still a cooking choice – even if it is an Intel board and one that's built around yesterday's chipset.

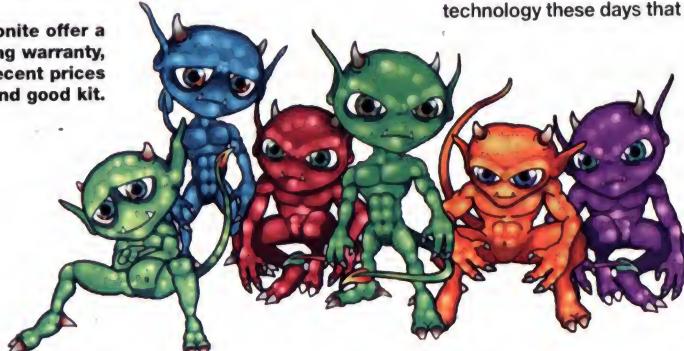
As for what processor to pair it with, I'm not surprised that you're confused by the

Pentium range. What Intel set out to achieve with its new numbering system actually makes a great deal of sense, in that chips are now graded by performance rather than clock speed, but few end-users understand it.

The 3.0GHz Prescott you've gone for is a good choice, and in most circumstances you'd be hard-pressed to spot any real world differences between it and the 3.2GHz. As long as you have at least 1GB RAM and a £200-£300 video card, you're striking a decent balance between value and performance.

However, reading between the lines, I'd say that your true problem is a lack of confidence. I lose count of the 6800 Ultra owners telling me they wish they'd gone with the GT, or the 6800 GT owners beating themselves up for not having enough courage to get the Ultra. My advice is that all of you need to get some fresh air. There's so little to separate similarly-priced technology these days that

Demonite offer a long warranty, decent prices and good kit.



Champion all-rounder, the Abit IC7-MAX3.

you have to be trying extra-hard to make a bad decision!

LEARNER SPENDER

Q I'm about to start university in a few weeks, and am looking for a new work and gaming station. I've been looking around and Demonite looks pretty cool – they're also cheaper than Alienware. I thought I'd consult you before committing to anything.

I'm willing to spend up to £1,500 and am undecided on whether to buy a laptop or a desktop system. Most budget systems are about £600 including a monitor and I'm not sure whether they're worth it, when you can get a decent system for double that. Any advice would be appreciated.

Paul Stanley

A Budget machines are for people who don't like computers. While you could buy a Dell Dimension 3000 for under £400 and pocket the leftovers, you'd end up with a PC more at home under a dust sheet in the corner of your grandpa's study than on a desk at your digs. 256MB RAM is nowhere near enough, the 17-inch CRT monitor is just horrid, and there's not even a mention of video cards in the configuration – price, rather than performance, is king.

So as if you couldn't guess, give 'value' PCs a wide berth. Moving up to mid-range

products, Dell remains biased towards business rather than games. The video card options are undesirable, you can't opt for an AMD processor, and while Office 2003 is an option, there doesn't seem to be any way for you to claim the educational discount to which you're entitled. (As a student, don't forget that Microsoft offers healthy discounts on key products.)

So my advice would be the Demonite Graduate. Go for the 3200+ or 3400+ Athlon, the 6800 GT and 1GB RAM. You could upgrade to a 19-inch LCD or a monster speaker set-up, but don't! If you're in close proximity to others, you'd be far better off with a pair of Speedlink Medusa 5.1 headphones. You also need to set £100 aside for that student discount copy of Office 2003.

INTERNET EXPLODED

Q I've just lost Internet Explorer 6 and MSN Explorer on Windows XP SP2. I tried to uninstall IE because it was hijacked. I opened the Add/Remove control panel, selected the Windows Components section, unchecked everything apart from IE but it went and deleted MSN Explorer, Outlook Express and Windows Media Player 9. How do I get them all back?

System Restore doesn't do the job, and when I reverse the process that I went through, it doesn't reinstall them. Luckily, I installed Mozilla Firefox but I want the others back because everything is messed up without them.

Biagrin Sackville

A I'd never suggest anyone try uninstalling Microsoft's browser – it's just too entrenched, for want of a better phrase. Many third-party applications use IE's

"Removing Microsoft's browser is like doing handbrake turns on the roof of your local multi-storey – exceedingly inadvisable"

rendering engine to display information, parse XML and so on and so forth. The moment you start tinkering with its innards, you risk breaking major parts of your system. Removing it altogether is like doing handbrake turns on the roof of your local multi-storey – exceedingly inadvisable.

To rectify the problem, you may need to perform a repair of XP. Before attempting a repair, I'd try the Internet Explorer 6 Service Pack 1 from microsoft.com/downloads. The accompanying documentation claims it includes a full installation of the browser, so you may be in luck. If you have no joy there, put your original XP CD in the drive, reboot and then press Enter to set up Windows XP. Once the setup program has detected your current Windows installation, select it and choose R to repair.

Please bear in mind that performing a repair may lose you many of your program settings and preferences, and it's quite likely that you'll have to reinstall applications and games – you can see why I never advise anyone to delete IE. Plus, once the repair has completed, you need to reapply SP2. For further details, read Microsoft's two Knowledge Base articles 293907 and 318378. Put both numbers into Google for more.

RAPTOR RAID

Q I have a P4C800 Deluxe and want to get the best out of it while the PCI Express business settles down. I bought a 3.4GHz Northwood, 1GB Gell and a 74GB Raptor drive, and because I'm running out of space and already have a 34GB Raptor,



The deluxe version of the P4C800 includes support for RAID 0, RAID 1 and Just a Bunch Of Disks – JBOD.

I thought I could RAID stripe them to increase space. I've started to read about RAID and it's apparently possible to put the 34GB and 74GB into an array – but how? I'd settle for transferring my data to the larger hard drive, or even getting another 74GB if I have to.

The P4C800 user guide says that the jumpers on one drive should be set to slave – but it doesn't say where! I'm also not sure how to keep the data I have on my hard drive.

One other potential pitfall is that I don't have a floppy drive, and the user guide says I need to transfer the RAID driver to a floppy to install it. There's quite a few issues here and I don't know which way to turn.

Richard Wales

A As well as supporting disk striping (RAID 0) for performance, and disk mirroring (RAID 1) for redundancy, the controller

on your motherboard supports JBOD, a no-frills method for concatenating all the drives in an array. What this means is that you can take multiple disks and combine their space, so that the operating system sees them as one large HDD – in your case, making 108GB from the two Raptors.

While this might sound ideal, the JBOD creation process involves wiping both drives – which can be fraught and hard work. You need to backup and then restore your existing system with a ghosting tool like Acronis True Image (which creates a 'snapshot' of your existing Windows install). However, since True Image needs to store the snapshot somewhere external to your PC while you format and make the JBOD, it's not an option.

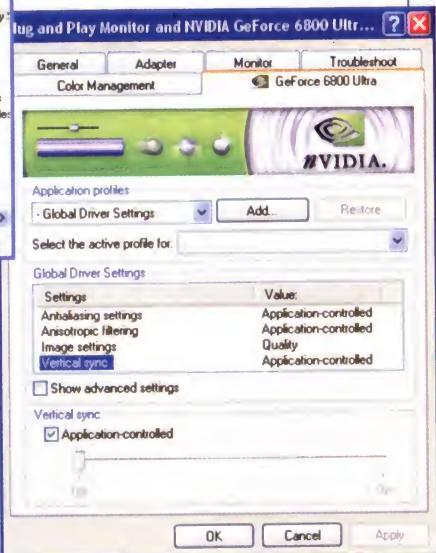
You could choose to create a RAID 0 array, but as with the JBOD alternative, the creation process involves the wiping of all the data from the two drives.

My advice would be to install the new 74GB Raptor as another drive. As you probably know, each IDE bus supports two drives, a Master and a Slave. To set your drive with jumpers, look either at the sticker on the top of the drive or at the housing alongside the jumper pins – it shows where to put the jumper for each configuration. If you get stuck, try www.dearwandy.com.

Visit Wandy on the Web at www.dearwandy.com

QUICKIES

SMALL, BUT BEAUTIFULLY FORMED



Q Since updating to version 61.77 of the NVIDIA drivers, there's no longer an option to force VSYNC for Direct3D – even though there's one for OpenGL! The

problem is that I'm getting tearing in some games, even when I've enabled VSYNC in the game options where appropriate. Any ideas on how to get around this? Any help you could give would be much appreciated.

Turdsniffa

A Of all the questions I've answered over the years, this one caused me the most trouble. No, seriously. Rather than simply corroborating what you'd said with NVIDIA, I decided to get my hands dirty. I tested both the 61.45 and 61.77 drivers on the ASUS SK8N machine I have, and found that their uninstaller removed key nForce files as well, leaving me with four warning triangles in the device manager and no network. Great. I had to get a fresh driver suite by transporting them back and forth on a 32MB mass storage device. After all that, I discovered you just need to leave VSYNC in the control panel set to 'application choice', rather than to 'on' or 'off' – then it should behave as you expect.

Q I'm looking to buy a completely new system – but what? At the moment there are three choices: Intel's 5-series with PCI Express, AMD 64-bit with AGP or Intel with AGP. The only thing I'm clear about is getting a 6800 GT! I want to play all the glorious games I've been missing like Far Cry and Doom 3 – sitting tight for PCI Express and DDR2 is becoming harder by the week. What should I do?

Simon H

A All the systems that have impressed me the most over the last four or five months have been Athlons, and our Buyer's Guide has recently been updated to reflect this. Do remember one thing though: AMD made an announcement back in May that the Athlon XP line will never support PCI Express. My advice would be to wait for one of the 939-pin PCI-E boards, due out before the end of the year.

Q Just wanted to know whether there are any issues with loading the SpywareGuard and SpywareBlaster software when you have Norton Firewall and Antivirus software already installed. Will it interfere with the cookies saved already for websites that I visit a lot, or will everything neatly fit together?

Paul Brown

A I see no reason why SpywareGuard and SpywareBlaster should interfere with your current set-up, and there's no call for it to mess about with legitimate cookies. Having said this, I should remind you that, as with any software these days, things can and do go wrong. Make sure your backups are up-to-date before you install anything!



WATCHDOG

Customer service you say? Customer disservice more like. Think you're getting a bum deal from a company? Tell us all about it and we'll send the boys round...

■ TAKING AIM Adam Phillips

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Don't worry – we're here to help when you're at the end of your tether. If you've got a consumer issue that needs addressing, then drop us a line.

WRITE TO Watchdog, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP

EMAIL Alternatively, email us at mailbox@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog'

READ ME!

If you're writing into complain about a product, please furnish us with your full name, address and **contact number**. With PCs, make sure that you also include all **purchasing details** such as reference and invoice numbers.

WANADOO DOO-DOO #1

We've featured complaints about Freeserve in the past – and while the company may have changed its name to Wanadoo, some people still aren't happy with the service it's providing. Take reader Jon Bailey, who's hopping mad at Wanadoo because he believes the company owes him money. Big time.

"I used to be a customer of Freeserve (now Wanadoo), and changed to BT," he explains. "After my contract had run out, my Freeserve account was closed (or so I thought) and payment details were passed to BT. The changeover was smooth and I had no problems – until I noticed a direct debit for £30 still going out to Wanadoo/Freeserve."

Jon discovered that this had been happening for two years – which means he's paid them £560 by accident. Oops. "The company didn't mention the unwarranted flow of cash, so I thought I'd give them a call," says Jon.

"Jon managed to get Wanadoo to admit that it owed him money, and the company promised him a cheque – which still hasn't materialised"

JON BAILEY'S PLAYING A WAITING GAME WITH WANADOO

To cut a long story short, Jon says he found himself in a position where both Wanadoo and BT were claiming that they were his broadband supplier. However, Jon managed to get Wanadoo to admit that it did indeed owe him money, and the company promised him a cheque for the £560 overpayment. Alas, the cheque hasn't arrived: "I've now been told that they 'don't send out cheques', but the situation is being investigated," explains Jon wearily.

Off we popped to Wanadoo, who told us that there had been a cock-up, but also said



Here's what Wanadoo's service looks like. If you can get it...

that the £560 quoted was a little on the steep side.

"Jon Bailey signed up to Freeserve Broadband in October 2002," explains a spokesperson for the company. "The minimum contract period is and was 12 months, and if a customer leaves to go with another provider in that initial 12 months, they will pay for both services."

Wanadoo says that your broadband service with Freeserve should have been terminated in October 2003 – 12 months after you signed up: "We will issue him with a refund of £251.91 – the total payments made since then."

Hope you're happy with that compromise, Jon. If not, 'doo-doo' drop us another line...

WANADOO DOO-DOO #2

Well done! You've taken the plunge and gone for broadband. All there is to do is wait for your phone line to be registered. And wait a bit more, as reader Angela Gaynor discovered when she signed up with Wanadoo.

"A few days after I registered with Wanadoo, I received the modem as expected," she explains. "On registering, I was told my phone line would be activated ten days after the sign-up date. I was then told it would be activated two days later, but that was two days

ago and I'm still unable to connect. The thing is, even though the connection is four days late, I'm still being charged £17.99 a month for something I don't have."

Fret not Angela. Wanadoo has informed us that its customer services team has been in touch and you'll be refunded any "payments made during lack of service".

COURIERING DIS-FAVOUR'

When does PC World's MasterCare say it will pick something up to fix it and then not? Quite often, according to hacked-off reader Adeel Arshad: "I'm having a problem with MasterCare and a repair the company performed on my laptop," he explains. "About a month ago, the screen on my laptop was cracked accidentally while in my bag. I sent it back



for repairs under the company's insurance cover and it was fixed."

Unfortunately, it would also seem that MasterCare managed to damage the laptop further by leaving scratches on it and, to make matters worse, it hadn't even fitted the screen properly.

"I've been on the phone to them on numerous occasions, but they seem to brush me off every time with a 'yes sir, we'll fix it', fumes Adeel. "Now I've been waiting for two weeks for a courier to come and pick my machine up for repairs – yet it never seems to show up!"

Over to you, PC World:
"We're sorry for any inconvenience caused to Mr Arshad while he was having problems during the repair of his laptop," states the company. "We've decided to replace the laptop as we have not been able to repair it within 28 days, as is our stated time period for Coverplan repairs."

PC World should now have been in contact with you, Adeel, to make arrangements to get a replacement laptop to you as soon as possible.

STUNG BY SAMSUNG

"Help!" is reader Steven Corry's plea after "experiencing the living nightmare of trying to get my Samsung monitor replaced", he explains. "It's been 16 days since it packed in and I'm still no better off."

You see, our Steven was told a replacement would arrive within two to three days, but was then informed that his monitor was out of stock. After two weeks, he was issued with a credit note that he would then be able to use with

THE ACCUSED



GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT



Reader Steven Corry's Samsung monitor took pride of place on his desktop...

the retailer he'd originally bought the monitor from - E-Buyer.

Oh dear. "E-buyer doesn't seem to have any concept of customer care - just one phone line with very long waits," fumes Steven. After finally getting hold of a human being at E-Buyer, he was told that he'd exceeded the retailer's own 12-month warranty by two days and that it was a manufacturer issue.

"But E-Buyer did say that if I sent in the credit note, it'd consider it. Unfortunately, once I came off the phone, I realised that E-Buyer must be housed in some sort of top-secret government building because it doesn't list its postal address anywhere. And I haven't been able to get back in touch since."

Back to Samsung then, who were still unable to offer a replacement or refund at that time, but could offer a similar model within the next few days - "but that was two weeks ago", fumes Steven.

Watchdog approached Samsung to see if something could be sorted: "Samsung is happy to report that the situation has now been resolved," said a spokesperson for Samsung.

"Upon hearing about Mr Corry's problems, Barry Sheppard, Samsung service manager, personally contacted Mr Corry to rectify the situation. Samsung has offered Mr Corry a brand new monitor in replacement for his faulty terminal. When the monitors arrive via Samsung's service provider, a convenient

delivery time will then be arranged. Mr Corry is happy with this arrangement and has accepted the new monitor."

Samsung would like to express its apologies for any inconvenience you've suffered, Steven.

CHUMP OF THE MONTH

Step forward and take a bow, Aria. Let us explain why... We received complaints about the company from readers Chris Harvey and James Woodland. Chris's anger was about a memory upgrade that was incompatible with his machine - and he puts the blame for the cock-up firmly on Aria's doorstep.

Meanwhile, James's complaint is about trying to get his Aria-sourced Creative Zen Xtra jukebox fixed, but he feels that he's being ignored by the company. "Numerous calls get ignored (a man can only spend so much time on hold with the same 20-second soundbite before going insane)," he told us. "And when I do stomach it out, I've been given every excuse under the sun!" he rages. "Computers down; issues; backlogs; ignorance; rudeness; playing dumb; more lies and excuses - you name it! Callbacks are promised but never returned.

The closest I've got to a reason for the delay is the unit is still out for testing and there's nothing that can be done!"



SAINTS NOT SINNERS

WE DON'T JUST LIKE TO HIGHLIGHT THE BAD GUYS - SOMETIMES THE GOOD GUYS CAN WIN TOO...

We've never received quite such a long list of salutations from a reader about a company before, but Michael Smith is smitten with Scan after he decided to upgrade his whole system through the company.

His new kit arrived in tip-top condition, but Michael started experiencing problems with Windows. After leaving a message with the company, he was called back within ten minutes by a fella called Rich, and the tech bod had Michael's machine up and running in no time at all. Unfortunately, Michael had other problems, but the trusty Rich was always on hand to dig him out of any technical black hole. Even when the computer packed in, a quick phone call to good old Rich saw an engineer on Michael's doorstep two days later.

Here though, we must draw Michael's celebratory story to a close before our eyes start to bleed from the sheer adulation that Michael heaps on Scan - needless to say, free upgrades and engineers at his beck and call have left Michael gushing. "Scan's customer and after sales service is wonderful - whoever heard of free upgrades? And please make a special mention for Rich in technical support for his patience and help! Scan has totally renewed my faith in online companies." See, the world isn't all bad is it?



A Scan technical support member caught on camera.

Needless to say, we sent off your complaints to Aria, who promptly got back to us. The company says: "Both of these are isolated incidents involving our customer service department. Aria is currently investigating the specific problems highlighted in these cases." So far, so vague. "We value our customers highly and apologise for any inconvenience caused to the individuals involved during their dealings with us."

We had asked for proper official responses on each case - like we do of all companies featured in these pages - but Aria was "unable to comment further". Which is all highly reassuring for customers considering using Aria... In the meantime, Chris and

James, if you haven't had your issues properly resolved by the time you read us, please let us know...

CHILL-TEK UPDATE

You may recall the plight of reader Dimitris Xydias (issue 147), who was thoroughly hacked off after he ordered and paid £40 for PC goods from Chill-Tek. Alas, the goods never turned up and we couldn't get hold of anyone at the company.

We've subsequently received another complaint from a frustrated reader, so thought it high time we dropped Perth Trading

Standards a line, as that's where the company's based.

With further investigation, it transpires that the company is in fact a sole trader called Mark Bartlett. Perth's principal trading standards officer Derek Hutchison told us: "We've had several complaints from consumers about non-delivery - but not recently. We've been trying to get hold of Mark Bartlett, but he seems to have disappeared."

Indeed, Derek has been knocking on Bartlett's door day and night, but to no avail at the time of going to press. Derek advises that unhappy punters can pursue Bartlett through the courts to get their money back. If you can actually find him, that is.

In the meantime, Derek says that he'll continue to try

and track down Bartlett, and that readers with a complaint about Chill-Tek are welcome to forward them on to him. Write to Derek Hutchison, Trading Standards, Pullar House, 35 Kinnoull Street, Perth PH2 5GD or email him on dehutchison@pkc.gov.uk

While Trading Standards can't help with civil cases, if Mr Bartlett does pop up again as a trader, your complaints could help Trading Standards get an enforcement order, which will make Bartlett court-bound not to repeat his 'past mistakes'. If he does, he'll be found in contempt of court...

Derek also asks you to let him know if you know where Bartlett is, or indeed if he does turn up operating another online business, as it could assist his investigations. 



Perth's principal Trading Standards officer Derek Hutchison wants to hear from unhappy Chill-Tek punters.

BUYER'S GUIDE

There are a flurry of new entries in this month's guide, so there's bound to be one to suit your needs...

Whether you want a new graphics card, motherboard or joystick, this is where to look to find the best on the market. Editor's Choice is the class champ, the product

that will satisfy no matter what you play. Our Recommended product wears a silver medal, not quite as triumphant as the outright winner, but a worthy alternative.

Finally, the Also Consider product is one we believe you should look at too before making your final decision. If you feel we've got something wrong, missed out a great

product or just want to add your own words of wisdom, mail letters@pczone.co.uk. If we act on your suggestion, we might even send you a gift. We're nice like that.

EDITOR'S CHOICE



A8V DELUXE WIRELESS

STREET PRICE £92

MANUFACTURER ASUSTeK
TELEPHONE 0870 1208 340
WEBSITE uk.asus.com

For the first time, an AMD board takes gold. Based on the VIA K8T800 Pro chipset, the ASUS A8V supports 939-pin Athlon 64 and FX processors (the engines behind the best gaming systems), and up to 4GB of dual-channel PC3200 RAM. Onboard dual RAID, 7.1 sound, automated overclocking and AGP8X complete the picture. The Wireless Edition comes bundled with more.

MOTHERBOARDS

NEW ENTRY



K8N NEO2 PLATINUM

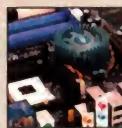
STREET PRICE £96

MANUFACTURER Micro-Star
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE msicomputer.co.uk

MSI's K8N Neo has always boasted stability and performance, and the new 939-pin, nForce3 Ultra variant is just as impressive. The Neo2 supports the new Athlon 64 and FX-53 processors and incorporates a dual-channel memory controller. The board includes 7.1 sound, Gigabit LAN, 8 USB 2.0 ports, 2 x ATA and 4 x SATA connectors. Multi-function RAID is also standard.

RECOMMENDED

ALSO CONSIDER



IC7-MAX3

STREET PRICE £123

MANUFACTURER ABIT Computer
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.abit.com.tw

Getting on a bit now, the Canterbury-based IC7-Max3 still provides a solid foundation for any Socket 478 Pentium-based games rig. It even looks great. The board has 5.1 onboard audio with optical out, Gigabit LAN, four-port SATA RAID, and ABIT's usual array of enthusiast-friendly features including SoftMenu Overclocking and OTES cooling. It's a real power-user's delight. If you don't want to stray from Intel, look no further.

NEW ENTRY



ATHLON 64 3500

STREET PRICE £235

MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE 01276 803100
WEBSITE www.amd.com

Now the 939-pin chips no longer require registered memory, the AMD64 route is a cheaper option. Smash open your old Pentium PC, snatch the PC3200 sticks from its banks and mate them with a new Athlon on an A8V Deluxe. Although the Hyper-Threading alternatives can be better for business and encoding apps, the 64-bit chips are great for gaming, the 3500 giving best value. Die-hard Intel fans are missing out.

PROCESSORS

NEW ENTRY



P4 3.2GHZ

STREET PRICE £220

MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403000
WEBSITE www.intel.com

With the price of the 3.0GHz now dropping to well below £200, it makes sense to spend just a little extra on the 3.2GHz. Hyper-Threading delivers a jaw-pounding, double-whammy power hit that pushes benchmark scores well ahead of the equivalent Athlon, and an 800MHz front-side bus paired with the right memory can make its presence felt. If you have a P4 motherboard, you're already set for an upgrade to remember.



ATHLON 64 4000+

STREET PRICE £550

MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE 01276 803100
WEBSITE www.amd.com

Although the FX-55 is AMD's hottest tamale, it's more expensive than the 939-pin, 2.4GHz, Claw-hammer-based Athlon 64 4000+ chip. And if you're thinking those specs look oddly familiar, full marks: the 4000+ is a rebadged FX-53 with its price shaved by £50, making it the slightly saner choice. Mind you, if you're looking to spend this kind of money, finding the extra nifty for the full-on FX-55 might not be an issue...

NEW ENTRY



WD1200JB 120GB

STREET PRICE £57

MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

You may well view a 120GB HDD as an extravagance, but with games getting longer and broadband getting wider, a hanger-like hard drive gives you plenty of room for mucking about. You'll also bring that never-ending quest for more room to an abrupt end. The price is just right, and the performance second to none. Like the DiamondMax Plus9, the WD1200JB features an 8MB cache and a speed of 7200RPM.

HDDS



DIAMONDMAX PLUS9 80GB

STREET PRICE £44

MANUFACTURER Maxtor
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.maxtor.com

The mid-sized Maxtor is for everyone: large, fast and not that pricey. 80GB is more than adequate for work, play and downloading requirements, and if you're greedy for more gig you can jump up a size. The Fast ATA, 7200RPM drive includes Maxtor's Shock Protection System and Quiet Drive Technology, but for the Serial ATA version, expect to pay a £20 premium.



RAPTOR 36GB

STREET PRICE £73

MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

If you don't need a deep hole for your data, or if you intend keeping your dirt on a separate drive, the 10,000RPM Serial ATA Raptor makes the ideal foundation for your primary partition. It's wickedly fast, perhaps the fastest HDD available yet, and although designed for server environments, provides gaming desktops with the kind of warp-nine, low access times that make any application more nimble.



GEFORCE 6800 GT

STREET PRICE £299

MANUFACTURER XFX Graphics
TELEPHONE 01327 315750
WEBSITE www.xfx.co.uk

The release of Doom 3 means that NVIDIA couldn't have timed its return to the top better. The 6800 GT is a slight step down from its Ultra-Ultra card in terms of performance (only by a few frames per second), but at under £300 it gives you much better value for money. If you can afford the not insignificant outlay, this is the card to buy – and your games will love you forever.

GRAPHICS CARD



GEFORCE FX 5900 XT 128MB

STREET PRICE £140

MANUFACTURER XFX
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.xfx.co.uk

The 5900 XT offers world-beating value – a top banana card packaged up with a mid-range price tag. In benchmarks, the 5900 XT is so far out front on power, it's snapping at the heels of big boys like the 9800 Pro. If you want the card that offers more frames per second per pound than any other, look no further. AGP is on its way out with a bang.



Radeon 9800XT 256MB

STREET PRICE £191

MANUFACTURER
ASUSTeK Computer
WEBSITE www.asus.com

With mainstream cards hogging the two front pews, it's only fair we give some space to the fastest card on the market: the world's best presented prize-fighter, the ASUS Radeon 9800XT. If you're lucky enough to have the requisite 300 quid burning a hole in your pocket, why settle for anything less? You even get a coupon for Half-Life 2, redeemable when the game's released.



REVOLUTION 7.1

STREET PRICE £90

MANUFACTURER M-Audio
TELEPHONE 0871 7177 100
WEBSITE www.m-audio.co.uk

Although it lacks a few of its rivals' gamer-friendly features, including hardware DirectSound and a joystick/MIDI port, the Revolution more than makes up for any deficit with a truly astonishing quality of sound. Unique technologies enhance your enjoyment of games, music and movies. The software is straight-talking and boasts a familiar look and feel, making the card a delight to work with.

SOUNDCARDS



AUDIGY 2 ZS

STREET PRICE £67

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

A quantum leap from its predecessor, the Audigy 2 offers a boggling range of pro-gamer and DVD features, including 6.1 surround sound, EAX Advanced HD, Advanced Resolution DVD-Audio and 24-bit/96kHz recording – it was the first card to gain THX certification from LucasFilm. If you appreciate the immersive experience offered by high-fidelity surround sound, the Audigy gives you an experience like no other.



AUDIGY 2 ZS PLATINUM PRO

STREET PRICE £144

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

With the same core features as its little brother, the Platinum Pro is guaranteed to perform and sound like no other. The external breakout box is a boon for serious listeners, including standard audio connections and volume controls. The big Platinum also offers dual SB1394 firewire ports and optical links, a stereo RCA input, plus MIDI In and MIDI Out mini-DIN sockets.



World's Most Powerful VGA EVER...

EDITOR'S CHOICE

RECOMMENDED

ALSO CONSIDER

**MX500**

STREET PRICE £34
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Although it comes with a tail and doesn't have the same substantive feeling as the battery-reliant MX700, the MX500 remains a solid product and a solid performer in all games. It features Logitech's MX optical engine, mouse wheel (plus two additional buttons either side to aide document navigation), a task-switcher button and two thumb buttons that speed up Web navigation.

OPTICAL MOUSE BLUE

STREET PRICE £17
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 6010 100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

If you've ever been boggled by the number of buttons on a mouse and have fond memories of a time when three-clickers and a wheel were all you needed, Microsoft's blue rodent is the perfect peripheral. It's nice to look at, nice to hold and, as any veteran FPS gamer will tell you, three buttons is all you need. Plus, the latest optical technology means it works anywhere.

**MX700**

STREET PRICE £47
MANUFACTURER ACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Sporting the MX optical engine that made Logitech famous with gamers, the MX700 is essentially an MX500 with its tail lopped off. A cradle keeps your desk tidy and acts as a recharger for the unfettered rodent – making the mouse more attractive to people who don't do batteries. However, it's a touch pricey and we remain unconvinced that going cordless is worth the extra stash.

**INTERNET NAVIGATOR**

STREET PRICE £21
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

The Internet Navigator lies absolutely flat on your desk, a trademark Logitech design that makes it look sleeker and feel nice. There's a scroll wheel along the left edge and a raft of customisable function keys to make trawling the Web a cinch – you no longer have to swap back and forth to the mouse, and instead can leave your hands over on the keyboard. Once you browse this way, there's no going back.

INTERNET KEYBOARD

STREET PRICE £15
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 6010 100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

Forget what you've learned about Microsoft software – its hardware is always of a high build quality and, despite problems with early Intellimouse rodents, very durable. Shortcut buttons you think you'll never use soon become second nature, especially when reconfigured to suit your way of working. And once you learn the enhanced layout, you'll never go back to anything else.

**PRO KEYBOARD**

STREET PRICE £46
MANUFACTURER Apple
TELEPHONE 0800 0391 010
WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk

If you think we're mad for including an Apple keyboard, think again. Anyone looking for a Rolls-Royce keyboard, and who can live without all the additional buttons, scroll wheels and assorted paraphernalia need look no further. The Apple Pro plugs straight into your USB port and, with the help of third-party utilities, disguises the fact that it was designed for computer illiterates with fewer than two mouse buttons.

**CYBORG EVO**

STREET PRICE £25
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com

A welcome new look for Saitek, with the welcome addition of a four-way adjustable head, larger buttons, plus a meaty damped throttle at the back of the base. As with all Cyborgs, the sculpted hand-rests can be repositioned ambidextrously and suit all hand sizes. An eight-way hat switch, five thumb buttons with trigger, four base buttons and a shift key to double the possible combinations make this a winner.

CYBORG 3D GOLD

STREET PRICE £22
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com

A former Best Buy, the Saitek stick is renowned for the way it can be taken apart and put back together to fit your hand perfectly, and also for its ambidextrous nature – lefties as well as righties can get to grips with it. It features seven fire buttons and, like the Sidewinder, has eight hat buttons, a lever throttle and a twist grip for controlling the rudder. At this price, you'd be daft not to.

**HOTAS COUGAR**

STREET PRICE £249
MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster
TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881
WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk

The John Holmes of joysticks. Based on the flight controls of an F-16, sturdy metal construction makes it feel like no other peripheral. With 28 customisable buttons, 18lbs of resistance built into its springs, programmable hat switches and an adaptive action for the separate throttle arm, it transforms any flight simulation and is the ultimate toy for wannabe pilots. It's ten times the cost of a regular joystick, but is in a class of its own.

**INSPIRE P580 5.1**

STREET PRICE £53
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

We don't like the idea of blowing a ton on speakers, chiefly because the mid-range Creative products are so good. You could spend a little more on a 7.1 set, but you'd lose out on space – and there's little benefit for games players. Instead, stick to the six-speaker P580s, which deliver crisp bass from the subwoofer and a clean, bright sound from the satellites. What's more, this latest design includes a headphone jack too.

Z-640

STREET PRICE £53
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Logitech has patented the pressure-driver design of its subwoofer and we can hear the difference. For the money, the clout is simply amazing – if you're a basshead, you'll love it. Higher frequencies don't disappoint either, the 5.1 sounding almost as clean and inviting as the Inspire 5300s. Unlike the Creative set, the Z-640 has a headphone socket, but it's not conveniently sited. Shame.

**MEGAWORKS THX 5.1 550**

STREET PRICE £189
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Successor to our Best Performance winner, the Megaworks 550 is a stunning 5.1 setup with five 70W capsule-shielded satellite speakers, a 150W wood subwoofer and a wired remote with a separate headphone socket. Built to THX standards, the sound quality is superb in DVDs and games – Creative's BASH system providing 500W of power that make you leap out of your seat.

**FLATRON L1730P**

STREET PRICE £355
MANUFACTURER LG
TELEPHONE 0870 607 5544
WEBSITE uk.lge.com

If you're after speed, quality and features, the 17-inch Flatron L1730P is the one to covet. It boasts a 12ms response time, has an amazing picture, a range of colour presets, detachable two-port USB hub and is TCO-03 compliant to boot. This accreditation means there's height and tilt adjust, plus the screen is lit uniformly – it's noticeably a superior image. The only drawback is the price, and the pivot feature won't interest gamers.

NEW ENTRY

CML174SXW

STREET PRICE £340
MANUFACTURER Hitachi
TELEPHONE 01628 585000
WEBSITE www.hitachidigitalmedia.com

We still think the 17-inch CML is one of the best-looking, best-performing flat screens on the market – even though it remains over £300. It delivers a great-quality image, weighs in at just 5kg, and comes in a choice of colours to match your kit. If you're wanting to make the move from CRT, and action games are a priority for you, the sensible, slim bezel Hitachi remains a solid choice.

**VISIONMASTER PRO 514**

STREET PRICE £398
MANUFACTURER Iiyama
TELEPHONE 01438 745482
WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk

Boasting a 22in Mitsubishi Electric DIAMONDTRON tube, 0.24mm AG pitch and flicker-free refresh rates at immense resolutions, the Iiyama is a breathtaking sight on your desktop – not least because it gobbles so much of it. The big VM also has a comprehensive on-screen menu, USB hub and audio connectors. At 1600x1200, the display is rock steady at 110Hz – and so ideal for gaming.

**EXTREME PC GAMING HEADSET**

STREET PRICE £15
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk

This fits all the criteria for a gaming headset: it's comfortable (so you can spend hours shouting at your team-mates without feeling you've been cuffed round the ear), the boom comes with an easy-to-position ratchet and it sports a noise-cancelling microphone with excellent voice reproduction. The cable's a bit short, but that's the only drawback – and at this price, it's a steal.

HS300

STREET PRICE £11
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Light and comfortable and with impressive audio considering the rock-bottom price, the Creative HS300's are well worth considering. Sound is rounded, with a decent scoop of bass, and while they can't match the Logitech Extreme for voice quality, your message still comes across loud and clear. If you're strapped for cash, consider these.

**AUDIO 90**

STREET PRICE £23
MANUFACTURER Plantronics
TELEPHONE 0800 410014
WEBSITE www.plantronics.co.uk

If your life is online gaming, you need a headset you can wear without developing earache – and the Audio 90 is the most comfortable set out of all the ones we've tested. The secret lies in the fact that you can pivot the speakers, which means they sit flush on your ear and block out any outside noise. Not the most stylish set on the market, but eminently functional.



Got this?

grand theft auto San Andreas

Then you need this!



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MAILBOX

Man's gotta do what a man's gotta do. And if that means writing us a letter, then so be it...

■ DALSTON COWBOY Dave Woods



Half-Life 2. We loved it. And soon you can too.

RAMBO

I loved your review of *Half-Life 2*, but one thing made me think. You said the AI was good but not the leap forward you were expecting. Well, how can AI ever be great when you can go through a whole level and don't get killed by a whole army of men? Sure, in *HL2* you've got that suit, but in *Far Cry* (which you also said had great AI), you can kill a whole army of enemies even on the hardest difficulty setting. In my opinion, the step



Gordon's back – and not a moment too soon.

forward for games would be to have more games like *Operation Flashpoint*. Enemies are actually dangerous. AI needs to be able to kill you.

Jamie Withey

It's a fair point, but you have to remember that AI isn't all things to all games. In an FPS, the idea of the game is that it's you against the world, it's not supposed to be real life. Hence the 'perfect' AI in an FPS is one that lets you get through

the game while giving you the illusion that you're fighting against real opponents.

THAT'S ALL FOLKS

I'm sorry to put a damper on your enthusiasm for next-gen graphics, but I think there's a problem. I may be a big sissy, but have you thought about what games are going to be like when they're photo-realistic? Playing a game like *GTA3* will be extremely distressing. Imagine going down the street zooming in with a sniper rifle and blowing off a granny's head. Or a game like *Postal*, where you can take a pair of scissors, cut off someone's head and use it as a football?

Dan Ashwell

Photo-realism is a way off, but even when it arrives, don't think that all games are going to go that way. *GTA* has always been a cartoony game, and there'll always be games that go down this route. They'll just look a lot better.

Dan Ashwell

the impact of *The Sims 2* may be bad initially, I think it will be good for the games industry in the long term.

Dan Ashwell

Speeding up the development of graphics? Any faster and you'll have to buy a new card every week to keep up with it.

HALF-LIFETIME

You're so cruel. You play *Half-Life 2*, give it a massive score, get me really excited about it, and then tell me that you don't know the release date. It might be out by the time the mag's out, it might not. Well, I've got the mag, read the review, and now I want to buy the T-Shirt (Collector's Edition if I'm not mistaken), but I can't. Any news? I've heard there's a court case rumbling on that could delay the game. Tell me, I've gotta know...

Matt Pollard

OK, we'll put you out of your misery. It's getting released on November 16 – so make sure you set your alarm and get down to your local shop pronto.

TOP TIP

Do you want to play the latest and greatest games without having to shell out for the latest graphics cards and processor to play them? Just do the following. Stockpile about two years' worth of PC ZONEs and don't open them. Subscribe and they'll come wrapped in plastic. Do

Chris Walton

Genius. Now why didn't we think of that before?

DENIED

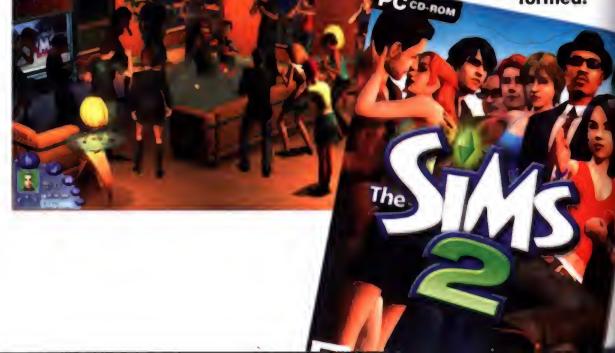
Quake, the greatest shooter series of all time? No way! *Unreal Tournament* could give *Quake* a toning anytime (via an ass-kicking). If I'd spent every

"You're so cruel. You play *Half-Life 2*, give it a great score and don't tell me a release date"

MATT POLLARD CAN'T WAIT. HE REALLY CAN'T...



The Sims 2: small, but perfectly formed.



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Shoot to kill in Counter-Strike: Source.



Look! It's Star Wars! Made of Lego!

hour studying law rather than blasting bots into virtual hell across awesome UT maps, I'd be one very knowledgeable judge by now.

The weapons and maps set the standards across the shooter genre. The bots actually seem intelligent and unpredictable. But the icing on the cake is the ability to select, name and customise the bots for fragging matches – I take great joy in fragging little computer versions of all my mates.

Steel0

Horses for courses. We love Quake III, even though it makes us very angry on occasions. And we love UT, even though it makes us angry on occasions. And

no, we're not sitting on the fence...

NO, NO, NO...

I read your preview in issue 147 of Counter-Strike: Source and it left me thinking, wtf? Along with many other people, I knew that CS:S was going to be regular CS ported over to the HL2 engine, and that a new Counter-Strike game was also going to be made after the release of HL2 (CS2 I think)? So then, what's wrong with Counter-Strike: Source being extremely similar to Counter-Strike? It's meant to be that way.

ColdFFF (Alex Denvir)

As is, Counter-Strike is getting extremely long in the tooth and we hoped that CS: Source

might make more use of the physics capabilities of the new engine. We still like it, we just want Counter-Strike 2. Now.

THE FORCE

I've just read your preview of Lego Star Wars and I can't wait! The thing is, I'm not a particularly big fan of Star Wars and I've never had a passion for coloured bricks when I was a toddler. No, the reason I'm getting excited is the prospect of being able to buy a AAA-rated game that will run on my PC at more than 5fps!

Don't get me wrong, I'm grateful to id for making Doom 3 so graphically challenging that I can actually take time to admire the gorgeous zombies for a few minutes before a Matrix-style bullet comes firing out of my gun. It's just not that easy to get through the game.

Edward Chu

A few people in the ZONE office have been getting unnaturally excited about this game as well. Damn George Lucas and his weird hypnotic hold on my staff.

FORE!

My son loves to play PC Games. Hardly a day goes by without him asking to play on the computer. He can't spell, read your magazine, or even write to PC ZONE himself. 'Just like most other gamers' you might be saying to yourself – only my son is four years old.

Currently, his favourite game is Deus Ex, which he refers to as 'bad man shooter!' His weapon of choice is the Rocket Launcher, Flamethrower and Sniper rifle, and he has a passionate dislike for Robotic Spiders. His other favourite games include Max Payne, Oni, Medal Of Honor and Dungeon Keeper 2. He also likes the Bob the Builder web page.

James Grimshaw

A man after Jamie Sefton's heart. He calls Pro Evolution Soccer 4 the 'football kick kick' game. 

LETTER OF THE MONTH

WELL, I LIKE IT

Just read your Driving Supertest in issue 146. I agree with most of the stuff you said, but you're not exactly fair on TrackMania. It's an online racing game, and you really should have mentioned the community. At www.tm-exchange.com there are more than 10,000 different tracks for download. I don't think any other racing game comes close to that. Plus, the TrackMania League Season 3 has just started, with 40 teams and 450 players competing each week...

TM might not have the best physics engine, but it's never pretended it has. It's the first game I've owned (and I have quite a lot) that I still find fun and challenging to play every day. Keep on racin', TrackMania Will!

Jorn Rossvoll

TrackMania's a lot of fun and the community that's built up around it is testament to that. We're expecting bigger and better things of the sequel, TrackMania Sunrise. And, while we're loath to give you a graphics card on the basis that you don't need one for TrackMania, take it and play Half-Life 2 with our blessing.



BACKCHAT

▲ US! YOU WERE MOSTLY TALKING ABOUT US THIS MONTH. HOORAY! JOIN IN THE FUN AT WWW.PCZONE.CO.UK

He came, he saw, he conquered issue 148, but you still can't buy him in the shops. Yep, issue 148 saw the return of Gordon Freeman, Half-Life 2 scored as much as any game in the history of PC ZONE and the land rejoiced. Along with Maritz: "Holy s**t! I'd gone a bit cold on the idea of HL2 after all the delays, the countless movies and screenshots. But suddenly I'm all excited again." Carpet_2001 couldn't contain himself and forgot about the no swearing rule. "F*** me. Best review ever."

Which it might have been, but it still wasn't good enough for some of you. TheTingler would like to draw your attention to the following points. "First, the boxout on subtitles. Please. Are you saying, Ant, that HL2 is extra-special because it's included them? LucasArts has been doing this for years. Also, being able to change difficulty levels without starting a new game. Nice idea, yes, but not Valve's. It was in NOLF2 as well. Oh, and I believe Martin was being a little harsh on Rome: Total War with regards to the score." Harsh? 93 per cent? Wait a minute, are you a PR person?

Escaped_Monkey didn't even get to the HL2 review. He was drawn to the 'Meet The Team' pics instead. "They're great. Dave Woods looks like he hasn't slept in years, Jamie Sefton looks like he was caught doing something naughty, Martin Korda just looks dangerous and Anthony Holden looks like he's modelling underwear. Paul Presley looks like an 'after' picture in a viagra advert, Will Porter looks like he's just solved yet another crime and made London a safer place to raise kids, Steve Hill looks like he's directing a porn movie and Richie

Shoemaker looks like he's watching said movie." Uncannily accurate. An attribute

Bagsabbis would also like to bestow on our review of Rome: Total War.

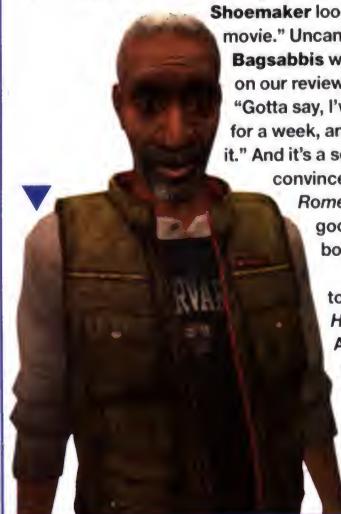
"Gotta say, I've been playing the game for a week, and that's the score I'd give it." And it's a score that was enough to convince Spudly2000. "Korda's

Rome: Total War review was so good that I went out and bought the game today."

Back to the Mac Daddy to round off though.

Half-Life 2 is almost here. And not a moment too soon for K3rm1t. "Great issue. The Half-Life 2 review had me covered in drool by the end."

"Something that we're rather proud of.



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THOM: Can u send me an unlock code for Half-Life 2? I'll pay u.

TONIS: Wow! 97%. This game is going to be the best...

JAK: Half-Life 2. Yawn. It's Rome for me. And you can buy it and everything.

SAM: More previews from Suzy please.

THE PCZONE A-LIST

◀ SHOOTERS ▶

HALF-LIFE 2



NEW ENTRY We always knew that somewhere within our PC there was the potential for absolute, outright brilliance – and now Valve's cracked it. *Half-Life 2* is a masterpiece, and a game that won't be trumped for a long, long time. Maybe not even until *Half-Life 3*. With physics, design, art and ambience to die for, this sequel builds on its Black Mesa roots with stunning aplomb. Gordon Freeman, we salute you.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Valve

PCZ ISSUE 148



FAR CRY

Far Cry may be several notches beneath *Half-Life 2*, but it remains an outstanding and exhilarating experience that pushes your rig and your nerves to their limits. The narrative may be iffy, but *Far Cry* is a cracking achievement.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Crytek

PCZ ISSUE 140



DOOM 3

Technologically dazzling, genuinely shock-providing and resolutely back to basics: *Doom 3* may not bring anything new to the FPS table, but it's still a stunning thrill-ride that every PC gamer should sample.

PUB Activision **DEV** id software

PCZ ISSUE 146



CALL OF DUTY

With an excellent expansion in the form of *United Offensive*, *Call Of Duty* remains the best war game on the PC – and possibly of all time. Constantly managing to mix up feelings of dread and excitement, it's an absolute must-play.

PUB Activision **DEV** Infinity Ward

PCZ ISSUE 136



MAX PAYNE 2

It's Payne! Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense and well-designed that you just won't care.

PUB Rockstar Games **DEV** Remedy

PCZ ISSUE 136



TRIBES: VENGEANCE

A generation-leaping storyline and some silky skiing and sliding slot this remoulding of the online favourite firmly into these hallowed pages. It's a brilliant and original game, even if a few levels are slightly lacklustre.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Irrational Games

PCZ ISSUE 147



NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

Style, stealth and magnificent set-pieces are the order of the day in this excellent spy sequel. It looks brilliant, it's well designed and is genuinely funny. What's more, it doesn't treat you like an idiot.

PUB Black Label Games **DEV** VU Games

PCZ ISSUE 122



HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS

Long in the tooth? Dated? Not one iota. The original *Half-Life* remains a touchstone for every shooter of recent years, and for good reason: it's fantastic, and remains so to this day. Play it again – the magic's still there.

PUB Vivendi **DEV** Valve Software

PCZ ISSUE 71



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

It may be a multiplayer game, but the superb bots of *UT2004* still grab it a place in the PC ZONE solo-shooter hall of fame. It's quite simply the greatest deathmatch experience money can buy.

PUB Atari **DEV** Digital Extremes

PCZ ISSUE 138



MAFIA

From the makers of *Hidden & Dangerous* and just as compelling, this game borrows from every great gangster film ever made. Tense missions, superb atmosphere and great AI – it's a classic in every respect. Badabing!

PUB Take 2 **DEV** Illusion

PCZ ISSUE 119

◀ STRATEGY ▶

ROME: TOTAL WAR



NEW ENTRY An engine that makes grown men cry, AI so great that Hannibal could be in charge and a cinematic tinge that grabs your social life and will not let go. *Rome: Total War* is every inch the champion we knew it would be. A few rough edges appear occasionally, but this is strategy far above anything we've seen in *Medieval: Total War* or anywhere else. The greatest battle simulator ever.

PUB Activision

DEV The Creative Assembly

PCZ ISSUE 148



RISE OF NATIONS

One of the most addictive and satisfying strategy games to land on our desks in ages. Its unique perspective, great gameplay and, now, its excellent expansion *Thrones And Patriots* make it hugely deserving of our prestigious Classic award.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Big Huge Games

PCZ ISSUE 129



SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII

The strategy of *Commandos* meets the fun of *Cannon Fodder* in this top-down game of tactics and warfare. Being the underdog has never been so much fun, and the rumbling of distant tanks never so worrying.

PUB Codemasters **DEV** Best Way

PCZ ISSUE 144



AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

The *Age Of* series goes 3D in Ensemble Studios' best strategy outing to date. Great gameplay, superb attention to detail and a strong storyline give this an unparalleled sense of atmosphere. In addition, it boasts a decent map editor.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Ensemble Studios

PCZ ISSUE 123



REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION

This highly original take on the machinations of political upheaval in Eastern Europe has split gaming opinion down the middle, but we think it's a fascinating, educating and unique piece of gaming history.

PUB Eidos Interactive **DEV** Elixir Studios

PCZ ISSUE 132



WARRIOR KINGS: BATTLES

Warrior Kings was one of the most compelling and diverse RTS games we'd seen. This second chapter, which focuses around skirmish play, offers more units, varied tech trees and challenging AI generals.

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Black Cactus

PCZ ISSUE 128



GROUND CONTROL II: OPERATION EXODUS

Despite a few AI glitches and dull objectives, *GCII* is a great game if you prefer tactics to boring old resource management. A superb sci-fi effort with some intense freeform missions – strat-fans should check it out.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Massive Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 143



WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR

An old school charmer with some flash visuals, varied units and super-flash presentation: what *Dawn Of War* loses in dull AI it wins through with sheer orcish belligerence. Multiplayer is pretty smart too.

PUB THQ **DEV** Relic

PCZ ISSUE 147



EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD

The latest to fall off the *Age Of Empires* lorry may not innovate, but there's a good variety of nations with accurate historical spins (General Patton, Richard the Lionheart etc), as well as novel unit types and well-written campaigns.

PUB Activision **DEV** Stainless Steel Studios

PCZ ISSUE 135



COMMANDOS 2

There have been a few imitators of the squad-based strategy of *Commandos* but none have come close to this sequel. If, like us, you loved the first game, you'll love this massive and preposterously detailed follow-up even more.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Pyro Studio

PCZ ISSUE 108

Welcome to the PC ZONE A-List, home to the greatest games in the land. To gain entry to these hallowed pages, a title has to be top of its respective genre. Ecstatic new entries this month include the glorious *Half-Life 2* and *Rome: Total War*, along with *Colin McRae Rally 2005*, *Tiger Woods 2005* and *NHL 2005*...

◀ ROLE-PLAYING GAMES ▶

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC



The best RPG to appear for five whole years, and the best *Star Wars* game to surface in ten. *Knights Of The Old Republic* manages to develop the franchise more than even Lucas's cinematic efforts ever could. With beautiful graphics, a gripping plot, oodles of Force powers and supreme character development, this is proof, if ever it were needed, that Bioware is one of the best development houses on the planet.

PUB Activision DEV Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 137



DEUS EX

Great sci-fi plot, amazing attention to detail and unparalleled player freedom: combining the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief*, *Deus Ex* is an RPG of complex beauty and a true revolution in computer gaming.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 93



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

One of the most impressive RPGs we've seen in years. A massively open-ended world full of beautiful visuals, superb depth of gameplay and innovative character development make this a classic that will keep you totally absorbed.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Bethesda Softworks
PCZ ISSUE 117



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

The maker of the epic *Baldur's Gate* series proves it's still a leading force in the world of RPGs with this glorious hardcore 3D adventure. It features great single and multiplayer options, along with a very accessible toolkit.

PUB Atari DEV Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 118



PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorcher of an RPG.

PUB Interplay DEV Black Isle Studio
PCZ ISSUE 87



DUNGEON SIEGE

Graphically brilliant, massively enjoyable and highly immersive, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the best RPGs to date and only misses out on a Classic award because of the shortcomings in the narrative.

PUB Microsoft DEV Gas Powered Games
PCZ ISSUE 115



SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Definitely one of the most original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it with the lights off if you're hard enough.

PUB EA DEV Irrational Games
PCZ ISSUE 80



BALDUR'S GATE II

The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. The sequel isn't vastly different, but it's bigger, better and still extremely addictive. If PC role-playing's your thang, this is essential.

PUB Interplay DEV Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 96



DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

It's had most of its role-playing elements sucked out and developed a strong console bias, but the gripping plot and action remain intact. It wasn't the revolution we wanted, but it's still a worthwhile purchase.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 137



DIVINE DIVINITY

This epic RPG contains the action of *Diablo II* combined with the storyline of the *Baldur's Gate* series, not to mention about 200 hours of gameplay in a huge fantasy world. The name may be a bit silly, but the gameplay is anything but.

PUB CDV DEV Larian Studios
PCZ ISSUE 121

◀ ACTION/ADVENTURE ▶

SPLINTER CELL



At long last we've got a new king of the action-adventures with the Tom Clancy-influenced *Splinter Cell*, and a new crown prince of stealth in the form of the über-flexible Sam Fisher. *Splinter Cell* features the perfect blend of action, structure and pace, combined with some of the best visuals and set-pieces around. No self-respecting gamer should miss out on this.

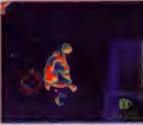
PUB Ubisoft
DEV Ubisoft Montreal
PCZ ISSUE 125



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

A beautiful game with a myriad of styles that evokes the spirit of *Little Big Adventure*, along with a touch of *Zelda* sparkle. Whether you're fighting government conspiracies or photographing wildlife, it's never dull.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft
PCZ ISSUE 138



SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

Two games in one: a set of excellent, if not revolutionary, missions for Sam Fisher coupled with a scintillating spies vs mercs multiplayer mode. Single-player is more of the same, but that's no bad thing is it?

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft
PCZ ISSUE 141



THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

Garrett's new adventure is sure to thrill, although you can't help but feel that it's been hampered by console considerations. That said, sublime level design, amazing sound and real scares make it an excellent buy.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 144



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

The fluidity, ingenuity and graphical splendour of *The Sands Of Time* cannot be faulted. Combat may be unsatisfying, but the time-control gimmicks and fast-paced acrobatics put Lara to shame.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft Montreal
PCZ ISSUE 136



GRIM FANDANGO

If you've followed LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must. The scripting is impeccable, while sublime graphics and brilliant humour ensure it's top of its genre.

PUB Activision DEV LucasArts
PCZ ISSUE 71



THE SUFFERING

A survival horror that's refreshingly fast and fluid, *The Suffering* takes place in an Alcatraz-style prison and surprised us with its ingenuity and tension-fused set-pieces. It gets slightly repetitive, but it's worth a ride.

PUB Midway DEV Surreal Software
PCZ ISSUE 145



SILENT HILL 2: DIRECTOR'S CUT

Survival horror games have truly come of age with this superbly creepy and atmospheric offering. The (near identical) third game is also out, but for our money this is still the champ. Classy and disturbing.

PUB Konami DEV Konami
PCZ ISSUE 126



METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE

A convincing PC conversion that adds tanker-loads of side-missions, training stages and unlockable characters to the PS2 original. There's too much waffle, but it's still an excellent third-person sneakfest.

PUB Konami DEV Konami
PCZ ISSUE 127



SOUL REAVER 2

With narrative and puzzles that *Legacy Of Kain: Defiance* failed to improve on, this instalment of the Raziel saga is well worth a look. Compelling storyline and satisfying combat make it an excellent budget buy, despite the ageing graphics.

PUB Eidos DEV Crystal Dynamics
PCZ ISSUE 111

◀ GOD GAMES



◀ SPACE COMBAT

**BLACK & WHITE**

Although it had its critics, we still stand by our original verdict. Peter Molyneux's vision is pure and the design of the game breaks boundaries and serves as a blueprint for the future. The add-on *Creature Isle* is also available, which cuts down on micro-management and enables you to guide your creature through a variety of mini-games. Pure genius in a box.

PUB EA **DEV** Lionhead Studios
PCZ ISSUE 100

**CIVILIZATION III**

Civilization III sticks to the same compulsive gameplay that made the first two games so popular. Die-hard Civ fans will relish the improved visuals and animation, while the new user-friendly interface makes the game accessible to the first-timer. Brings to mind the maxim 'if it ain't broke...

PUB Atari **DEV** Firaxis Games
PCZ ISSUE 111

**EVIL GENIUS**

It's always more fun being the bad guy, and when you're an insane megalomaniac it's even better. *Evil Genius* awakens the Blofeld inside you, with all the henchmen, lairs and diabolical plans you could ask for. Basic graphics, ace gameplay.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Elixir
PCZ ISSUE 147

**THE SIMS 2**

We still hate *The Sims*, we hate them and everything they stand for, but even we have to admit that the sequel's a good game in itself. We found it addictive and absorbing when we reviewed it – but we'll have changed our tune by the time the fifth expansion pack is dribbled onto the market.

PUB EA **DEV** Maxis
PCZ ISSUE 147

**VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG**

An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself, *Make It Big* provides hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that let you suck the money out of punters' pockets. It can get a little too fiddly, but it looks and plays really well. A PC ZONE 'Essential'.

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Deep Red
PCZ ISSUE 135

**SPACE COLONY**

Whether you're trying to attract space-tourists or battle neighbouring aliens, taking control of 20 rowdy space colonists and pandering to them makes for a charming and original management jaunt, with plenty of missions to keep you busy for a fair while.

PUB Gathering **DEV** Firefly Studios
PCZ ISSUE 136

**GHOST MASTER**

Take your team of ghosts into the town of Gravenville and solve some otherworldly problems, scare a few mortals and bag yourself some new team-mates in this innovative spook 'em up. *Ghost Master* is one of the freshest and funniest games we've seen for a long time.

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Sick Puppies
PCZ ISSUE 130

**EMPEROR: RISE OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM**

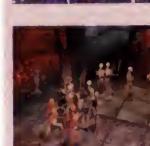
This intricate game comes from the same stable as *Zeus and Caesar* – and they know a thing or two about city building. There's a massive amount of gameplay and more than 50 missions spanning seven historic campaigns. As well as the economic considerations, you'll have to follow feng shui and the Chinese zodiac.

PCZ ISSUE 121

**SIM CITY 4**

The latest outing of the best-selling city-building sim goes 3D. Unfortunately, there are no huge leaps forwards in gameplay, but there are plenty of features, such as regional cities, imported characters from *The Sims* and a terrain editor to keep you occupied.

PUB EA **DEV** Maxis
PCZ ISSUE 125

**DUNGEON KEEPER 2**

The ultimate 'it's good to be bad' game, *Dungeon Keeper* was a great idea and *DK2* keeps up the good work. It takes the essence and humour of the original, corrects all the mistakes, vastly improves the graphics and adds a myriad of new features that build wisely on the original concept.

PCZ ISSUE 79

X2: THE THREAT

Vast, engrossing and utterly compelling. We firmly believe that *X2* is the game that can finally banish the memory of *Elite* to the shadows. The level of detail here is immense, as is the potential. Build your own space empire, form a pirate fleet or just bomb around the universe like an interstellar playboy. The game could go on forever. And did we mention it's also gobsmackingly beautiful? OK, the story isn't all that, but while nothing's perfect in life, *X2* comes very close.

PUB Deep Silver **DEV** Egosoft

PCZ ISSUE 138

**FREELANCER**

Freelancer combines the epic open-endedness of *Elite* with the combat immediacy of the *Wing Commander* series. It also mixes in a well played out (if short) story and gorgeous graphics to create a totally engaging experience.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Digital Anvil

PCZ ISSUE 128

**X - GOLD**

The spirit of *Elite* lives on in this massive trading epic, in which you must buy and fight your way back home to Earth. It rewards patience with variety and months of absorbing gameplay. Deeply hypnotic and beautiful rather than tense and frenetic.

PUB THQ **DEV** Egosoft

PCZ ISSUE 82

**TERMINUS**

Who says the days of bedroom programming are over? *Terminus* proves you can make a great game on your own if you have the talent and passion – we reckon it just edges out the mighty *FreeSpace 2*.

PUB www.macgames.co.uk **DEV** Vicarious Visions

PCZ ISSUE 93

**FREESPACE 2**

Following in the footsteps of *Wing Commander* and *X-Wing*, *FreeSpace 2* offers fast-paced dogfighting action all the way. It has an epic story and superb graphics, but does suffer from being a bit short-lived if you don't play online.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Volition Inc

PCZ ISSUE 84

◀ MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER

**EVERQUEST**

EverQuest keeps going from strength to strength and now has a total of seven expansion packs. One of the best of these, *Planes Of Power*, provides a multitude of simplifications to help newcomers, while adding lots of new worlds for high-level characters to explore. It's a truly beautiful and captivating game that has claimed the souls and social lives of thousands of people the world over.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Sony Online Entertainment

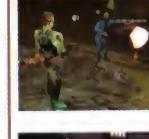
PCZ ISSUE 117

**EVE ONLINE**

Eve Online is as beautiful as it is complex, oozing style from every pixel. Choose from four unique races and explore the *Eve* universe with its unparalleled scope for adventure, interaction and trade.

PUB Crucial **DEV** CCP

PCZ ISSUE 130

**ANARCHY ONLINE**

A beautiful MMOG with detailed environments and a huge selection of armour and weapons, *Anarchy Online* is an immersive title. Many of the bugs have been ironed out and the latest update offers a slick gaming experience.

PUB Funcom **DEV** Funcom

PCZ ISSUE 114

**STAR WARS GALAXIES: AN EMPIRE DIVIDED**

Despite a shaky start, *SWG* is now thriving – partly down to the addition of vehicles, Jedi and player housing, and partly because *Star Wars* fans are loyal as dogs. The *Jump To Lightspeed* expansion should boost things further.

PUB Activision **DEV** Sony Online Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 138

**DARK AGE OF CAMELOT**

The alternative to *EverQuest* with a loose basis in European mythology and three-way PvP realm combat, this is also a bearded version of *PlanetSide*. Recent graphical updates have breathed new life into it.

PUB Mythic Entertainment **DEV** Mythic Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 142

◀ ONLINE SHOOTERS

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004



A fleshed out, revamped *UT* offering that far exceeds both its predecessors and our expectations. Extra game modes, superb vehicles plus inspired weapons and features make this one of the best multiplayer blasts around. The new Onslaught mode has given a new dimension to the series, adding tactical awareness to the list of skills online shootists need to master. It even plays well offline, making *UT2004* the definitive choice.

PUB Atari DEV Digital Extremes

PCZ ISSUE 138



BATTLEFIELD 1942

Not much in single-player, but online this Swedish gem has redefined the way online shooters work. Infantry, jeeps, tanks, planes, bombers, ships – the total WWII experience (minus the searing horror and psychological scarring for life).

PUB EA DEV Digital Illusions

PCZ ISSUE 121



JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING

150 players! Count 'em. Some say a world record (although *PlanetSide* begs to disagree), this is modern-day online warfare at its finest. Quality maps, plenty of vehicles and the best helicopters in the business – why, it even has useful mortars.

PUB NovaLogic DEV NovaLogic

PCZ ISSUE 145



BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM

Take *BF1942*, drop it into the '60s and bingo – the total Vietnam war experience. More claustrophobic than *BF1942*, which suits the jungle warfare period setting, this has a great '60s mood: all it needs is the late Brando and it'd be perfect.

PUB EA DEV DICE Canada

PCZ ISSUE 141



PLANETSIDE

Truly the mother of online battles, *PlanetSide* is a never-ending war among three armies and waged across several continents. Superb squad battles, stunning vehicles and atmospheric visuals make for a remarkably immersive experience.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Sony Online Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 131

◀ SPORT

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4: SEASON 03/04



A fresh season is added to the CM4 canon, along with a variety of nips and tucks to smooth out the gameplay. The top-down match engine that enables you to watch how your players are performing still works like an absolute dream. The ongoing financial crises plaguing football means that playing the transfer market is a struggle, but the game is still as life-sappingly addictive as it ever was.

PUB Eidos DEV Sports Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 137



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3

Our guilty console secret has landed on the PC, and it's as good as we hoped. Better than *FIFA* in every conceivable way (bar the official licence of course), there is no greater footie experience available.

PUB Konami DEV Konami

PCZ ISSUE 136



VIRTUA TENNIS

Who would have believed that this console favourite would translate so well to the PC? Its control interface is supremely intuitive, while the AI is massively challenging. Best of all, though, are its truly sublime multiplayer options.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Hitmaker/Strangelite

PCZ ISSUE 114



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2005

NEW ENTRY Some new game modes gives 2005's Tiger 'em up some welcome variety – although even without them, it would remain the PC's premier golf sim. This year is a good vintage too, with visuals to die for.

PUB EA Sports DEV EA Sports

PCZ ISSUE 148



NHL 2005

NEW ENTRY Shiny and beautiful, yet nowhere near as vapid as its *FIFA* compatriot, EA's *NHL* series continues its run of consistent excellence. Better AI, better production and as slick as they come.

PUB EA Sports DEV EA Sports

PCZ ISSUE 148

◀ DRIVING GAMES

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY



PS2 owners will finally stop gloating when they see Vice City's glorious PC incarnation. *GTA3* was an incredible crim-sim; so incredible that it was hard to see how it could be improved, but the freedom and variety of its follow-up is blinding. Whether it's carrying out its remarkably inventive law-breaking missions or just shooting pedestrians, Vice City is about as close to gaming perfection as you can get.

PUB Rockstar Games DEV Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 131



GRAND THEFT AUTO III

It may have been overshadowed by its younger brother, but *Grand Theft Auto III* remains as awesome as it ever was. It's a great spin on both driving and shooting genres and you'll still love its noisy orgy of violence and speed.

PUB Rockstar Games DEV Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 117



TOCA RACE DRIVER 2

The most comprehensive driving game on the PC, *TOCA 2* is a must-have if you're into motors. With 15 different motorsports to master, 52 tracks and rival drivers with good AI smarts, it's the best racer on the market.

PUB Codemasters DEV Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 142



COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2005

NEW ENTRY More of a tweak than an overhaul, the fifth *McRae* boasts immaculate handling and oodles of gameplay potential. With excellent damage modelling and plentiful motor-fiddling opportunities, it's the best rally game around.

PUB Codemasters DEV Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 148



JUICED

The growing car-modding genre gains another excellent racer in the form of *Juiced*, a game that outdoes *NFS: Underground* with some great graphics, impressive AI and a great sense of personalisation. We like.

PUB Acclaim DEV Juice Games

PCZ ISSUE 147

◀ 3D ACTION / STRATEGY

OPERATION FLASHPOINT GOLD



Now available with the tricky *Red Hammer* add-on, *Flashpoint* has become to tactical action what *Half-Life* was to shooters. Fight on foot or in tanks, fly planes or even direct an entire platoon, this game is total war – in your face and on a massive scale. The graphics are an acquired taste, but they convey a sense of wide-open warfare perfectly. It's the ultimate military simulation, with a stunning atmosphere and superb missions.

PUB Codemasters DEV Bohemia Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 104



HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2

With a real Boy's Own feel, a ninja-bastard difficulty rating and the same superb engine as *Mafia*, *H&D-2* is one of the finest squad-based tactical shooters around. It's got a few bugs, but it's still an essential purchase.

PUB Gathering DEV Illusion Softworks

PCZ ISSUE 136



RAINBOW SIX: RAVEN SHIELD

All the style and presentation you would expect from a Tom Clancy game, from the realism of the weapons down to footprints in the snow. A tactical and atmospheric game that can be frustratingly tricky at times.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft Montreal

PCZ ISSUE 127



FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR

A remarkably innovative military simulator, *FSW* provides tense urban combat with you in a commanding role – despite feeling as if you're in the line of fire with your two fire-teams. It gets repetitive, but it's worth a look.

PUB THQ DEV Pandemic Studios

PCZ ISSUE 147



HIDDEN & DANGEROUS: DELUXE

This revamp of *H&D* removes all of the infamous bugs from the original, as well as including three extra campaigns. There's been a lot of work put into improving the graphics and modding fans will relish the new editor that ships with this edition.

PUB Take 2 DEV Illusion Softworks

PCZ ISSUE 115

DISC PAGES

DOUBLE-TROUBLE!

The PC ZONE DVD is now double-sided, which means you get twice as much content as before. If you can't find what you're looking for on the DVD, close the PC ZONE disc browser and turn the disc over.

THE GOOD LIFE



DISCWORLD

■ WORDS & DISCS Suzy Wallace

▲ Sometimes life can be predictable. For instance, you know that autumn will see another rendition of *FIFA*, that a version of *The Sims* will see off the competition to take the number one slot in the charts, and that most people are envious when I tell them what I do for a living.

You see, on paper, our jobs here at PC ZONE sound like a dream. Working for a games magazine probably appears on a lot of peoples' list of dream careers, nestling comfortably alongside famous actor, astronaut and porn star. But, and I hate to break it to you dear reader, there are downfalls.

As your faithful disc editor, it's my duty to play through every demo on the discs. The trouble is, the quality of demos can vary, and when you've just been forced to endure German RTS demo number seven, featuring several hours of tedious resource collecting, your eyes start to glaze over a little. Then months like this one come along, and after playing through the fantastic demos I've got for you, I can happily rest on my laurels knowing this month's discs are some of the best I've had the pleasure of providing – and I reckon you'll be suitably impressed with what's on offer too. With titles such as *Full Spectrum Warrior*, *Tribes: Vengeance*, *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude*, *Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within*, *Evil Genius*, *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War*, *Men of Valor*, *FIFA Football 2005*, *Rollercoaster Tycoon 3* and more, who wouldn't be? So don't just sit there gawping – get installing!

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR

CD 1/DVD Pub: THQ Dev: Pandemic Studios Rev: Issue 147, 80%

ON THE CD
ON THE DVD
IF YOU THINK the US Army's only good for shooting at our troops, then this stunning exclusive demo of *Full Spectrum Warrior* could well prove you wrong.

It's a squad-based tactical combat affair based on a training aid for the US Army, so

forget rushing headlong into battle – this is all about using superior tactics. There are five training missions to get you accustomed to MOUT (Military Operations in Urban Terrain), before taking control of Alpha and Bravo squads for real.

CHALLENGE
SUZY!

UNSCATHED! Complete the entire mission without taking a single hit.



Find every enemy position located on this map.

WE'VE
DONE THE
RECON SO
YOU DON'T
HAVE TO

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

Enemies in *FSW* aren't the dumb individuals you may find in other games. They'll use cover, move to better positions and are a pretty good shot with their Kalashnikovs. Here's how to oust them...



FLANKING MANOEUVRES These are the mainstay of the game and they're near essential for taking out enemies using cover. Keep them distracted with one squad while the other finds another way around to a clear shot.



SUPPRESSING FIRE/SMOKE GRENADES Keep them pinned down with suppressing fire (beware – it's ammo-intensive), or lob some smoke grenades to give you the cover you need to make quick dashes to a more secure position.



HEAVY WEAPONS If you encounter stiff resistance or are just feeling too lazy to flank, take them out completely using a well-placed frag grenade, or the M203 grenade launcher for more stubborn emplacements.



IMPORTANT!

You can find all of the content here on the DVD, but we can't cram everything onto the two CDs. This is because we can get more than six times the content on our double-sided DVD, including a

library of patches and utilities, along with DVD-video (that you can watch on your TV), bigger movies and more playable demos. Demos and movies are getting bigger all the time, and certain

games are going to be released on DVD-only. If you still haven't upgraded to DVD, do it now. You can pick up a cheap drive for about £20, so there's no excuse. Unless you're a real pikey.

LEISURE SUIT LARRY: MCL

CD 1/DVD Pub: VU Games Dev: High Voltage Rev: Issue 149, 65%

 **SEXUAL** puns and bouncing breasts can be found in abundance in this exclusive demo, which sees you take control of old-timer Larry Laffer's sex-starved nephew, Larry Lovage. Despite looking seriously underage and a vision in nylon, Larry Junior is determined to try to get jiggy with anyone he can find in his college corridors. It's up to you to help him out.



Sally Mae bursts out.



Math nerds - the new Men In Black?



EXCLUSIVE

GAME FOR A LAUGH

The er... Excitement in *Leisure Suit Larry* is largely to be found in the mini-games. Here are the three featured in the demo



IMPRESSING SALLY MAE

When you first meet up with the top-heavy Sally Mae, you'll be caught on a phone call. The other person hangs up but letting her know would ruin your chances.



DANCING WITH SALLY MAE

MAE Once you've got past introductions, further attempts to talk to Sally Mae will be rewarded with an opportunity to show off your dance moves to some country music.



GIVING OUT FLYERS

Try to leave the school and you'll be set the task of giving out some flyers. Sounds easy, but it's the trickiest mini-game here as you attempt to distribute them by throwing them to students.

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005

Pub: Sega Dev: Sports Interactive Rev: Issue 149, 90%

THE CONTEST

 between Sega's *FM2005* and  Eidos's *Championship Manager 5* begins with this taster of *FM2005* to give you an idea of what to expect. Sports Interactive's demo features six months of play in the English and Scottish leagues. Warning! This game can be very addictive and may ruin relationships...



KNIGHTS OF HONOR

Pub: EA/Sunflowers Dev: Black Sea Studios Rev: Issue 148, 66%

PLAY AS

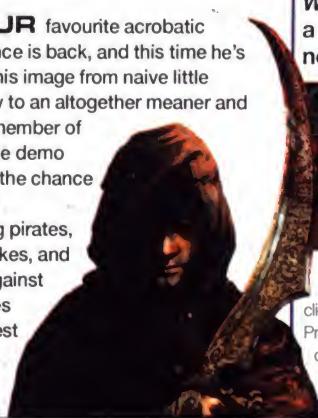
 either the Kingdom of Bohemia or Scotland in this exclusive medieval European strategy demo. Attempt to conquer Europe by improving your empire, making trade alliances, marrying off your offspring, recruiting knights to do your bidding or like us, just trying to wipe out France as quickly as possible. The best option.



PRINCE OF PERSIA: WARRIOR WITHIN

DVD Pub: Ubisoft
Dev: Ubisoft Montreal

 **OUR** favourite acrobatic Prince is back, and this time he's changed his image from naive little schoolboy to an altogether meaner and moodier member of royalty. The demo gives you the chance to fight off marauding pirates, dodge spikes, and face off against two bosses who will test your new abilities.



SLICING ON THE CAKE

Warrior Within sees a newer, darker Prince. He's now livelier than a flea on speed and deadlier than a tramp's BO, courtesy of his new freeform fighting abilities. Here are our favourites...



HEAD RUSH While you're holding two blades, hit left-click, left-click, E, to make the Prince swing around and decapitate your enemies in stylish slow motion.



BULL'S-EYE! For a special kind of smack in the face, make sure you're holding two blades, then press C to launch one into an enemy's face. It's just like being Phil 'The Power' Taylor.



COLUMN SHREDDER Use the handy column in the bowels of the ship to swing around and perform some 360-degree decapitating action by pressing left-click towards the column.

WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR

Pub: THQ Dev: Relic Rev: Issue 147, 81%

  the 41st millennium, this demo sees you in control of the fanatical Blood Raven chapter of the Space Marines. The mission charges you with taking out the Ork bases, so your first step should be to set up a base and build up an army to vanquish your foes in the name of the Emperor. Watch out for the Orks' big surprise, though.

CHALLENGE SUZY!

BIG GAME HUNT Can you take out the Squiggoth without any of your troops dying?



● ALSO ON THE CD

FIFA Football 2005, *Evil Genius*, *Hamsterball Gold*

● ALSO ON THE DVD

Tribes: Vengeance Multiplayer, *Men Of Valor Multiplayer*, *Hidden & Dangerous 2: Sabre Squadron*, *Rollercoaster Tycoon 3*, *Scrapland*, *Camgo*

GTR

DVD Pub: 10tacle Studios
Dev: SimBin

 **Die-Hard** driving fans like myself have plenty to smile about this month with this rip-roaring demo of *GTR*. Featuring the Spa circuit and one

car from each series, you can choose the Arcade mode, or pick Semi-Pro to take on the pedal-to-the-metal challenge of an entire race weekend. Review soon.

BEAT THE CLOCK!

Can you beat Suzy's time on this track?

SPA CIRCUIT (S.PRO)

2:18:01



MOVIES

OUR FEATURE PRESENTATION...

VAMPIRE: BLOODLINES - THE MASQUERADE

CD/DVD The Source-engined vampire RPG from Troika is out and will immerse you in its dark and seedy little world with the help of these nefarious individuals.



FACIAL ANIMATION The Source engine is put to great use.

PC ZONE



CHARACTER CLASSES Play as this S&M style vamp. Kinky.

PC ZONE



BLOOD Ah... The staple diet (geddit?) of the game.



BREASTS It's like *Star* Hill in *Spearmint Rhino*.

ALSO SHOWING...



PRINCE OF PERSIA: WARRIOR WITHIN (DVD ONLY) - If you thought the combat was a bit lacking in *The Sands of Time*, you'll be impressed by this movie showing off some of the new moves the Prince has learnt. We've also got a teaser and an interview with the swordmaster who performed the motion capture on DVD-Video.

DON'T MISS - Decapitate undead pirates yourself in the demo on the DVD!

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH (DVD ONLY) - The seventh part of the 'Inside The Battle' mini-series sees the developers talking in detail about the new powers to be found in our cover game, *BFME*. Once you've earned enough power, you'll be able to call upon these to assist you in your fight.

DON'T MISS - The army of the dead taking down the almighty Balrog.

PSYCHONAUTS (DVD ONLY) - Effortlessly blending a mix of bizarre platform elements, cutesy characters and a comic storyline, *Psychonauts* looks like being one of the most original titles in development. Check out this chuckle-some movie featuring some of the weird and wonderful members of cast.

DON'T MISS - The view through somebody's ears when their brains have been removed.

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005 (CD 2/DVD) - As *FM2005* and *Championship Manager* hot up for the oncoming battle of the football managements, Sega has released this brilliant teaser for *FM2005*. We won't give it away, but it's a brilliant twist on the one-man-and-his-dog story. Don't forget to try the demo on the discs as well.

DON'T MISS - The referee as a black sheep. Nice symbolism.

● ALSO ON THE DVD *GTR*, *The Bard's Tale*, *X2: The Return*, *FlatOut*

EXTENDED PLAY



EVERQUEST II CHARACTER CREATION TOOL

UBISOFT is promoting the build-up to the release of *EverQuest II* with this exclusive Character Creation Tool. Get a head start in Norrath by using the software to create your own character, that you'll then be able to import into the game. Failing that, it's just a great way to laugh at some women with beards without fear of being clumped round the head. Fifteen separate races are available in both genders, and you can choose your alignment based on your character choice. Once you've decided on those, you can delve into the more detailed options to make your character truly unique. Turn to p118 to see the terrifying creations of the ZONE team.

UT2004 EDITOR'S CHOICE EDITION BONUS PACK

CD **DVD** This fantastic Bonus Pack from Epic features some of the extra content to be found in the forthcoming release of the *UT2004 Editor's Choice Edition*. There are six new characters, three new vehicles, and four unique Onslaught maps to keep this frag-fest in tip-top shape over the winter.



Test-drive the Paladin.

MEQON PHYSICS DEMOS

CD **DVD** WITH 3D Realms's announcement that it's licensed Meqon's physics engine for use in *Duke Nukem Forever*, we thought we'd let you take a look at what's in store. A general demo lets you explore the different aspects of the engine, and a playable Jeep demo complete with fully destructible elements reveals the engine at work.



3DMark05 has bright sparks aplenty.

3DMARK05

CD **DVD** IF YOU'VE recently splashed out some major cash on a graphics card and want to see how good an investment you've made, we've got the latest version of 3DMark for you (Essential Software, Side 2 of the DVD). It's taxing stuff that requires DirectX9.0c (you can find this in the *Men Of Valor* demo), and features the ability to go online to gloat or cry once you've got a result measuring how your card performs.

● ALSO ON THE CD *Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within* 3D screenshot (Column Slicer 360)

● ALSO ON THE DVD *Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within* 3D screenshot (Column Shredder 360), *Call Of Duty: United Offensive Tools*, *Far Cry SDK*, *Doom 3 SDK*

HELP!

CD trouble? Don't worry - phone our helpline on 01225 442244 and ask for cover disc support. Or email support@futurenet.co.uk.

BEFORE YOU DIAL...

If you're calling the helpline:

- If possible, have your PC operating and near the phone when you call.
- If this is not possible, note down all relevant information - ie system type,

soundcard, RAM and so on, along with the nature of the fault.

- Have a pen and paper to hand so you can jot down the relevant info.

MINIMUM SPECIFICATION

- To run the software on these discs, you need at least a PIII 1GHz or equivalent, with a GeForce 3 64MB graphics card and 256MB RAM (512MB recommended for Windows XP users).

DISCLAIMER

- This disc has been thoroughly tested at all stages of its production. However, it's always wise to use a virus checker on any software before running it.
- Future Publishing Limited cannot accept responsibility for any loss, disruption or damage to your data or your computer system (including hardware) that may occur while using either the disc or programs and data on it.



Alienware recommends Microsoft® Windows® XP.

Alienware Difference

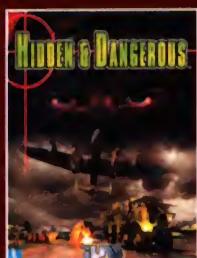
- Alienware Upgrade Policy
- Freephone Hotline
- Cutting-Edge Technology
- 24/7 Freephone Tech Support
- Alienware 14-Day Return Policy



www.alienware.co.uk/pcz | 0800 279 9751
[Outside of United Kingdom 00353 906 456 500]

Alienware high-performance systems provide the power to experience the latest games without compromise. Don't let your PC handicap your score, check out the ultimate PC gaming power ups from www.alienware.co.uk





GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS

In 1999, a tiny development studio from Eastern Europe showed us that beating the Third Reich ain't a one-man job – it takes a team of experts and some careful planning. Sam Kieldsen dons his beret and talks to the makers of *Hidden & Dangerous*...

IT'S A style of game that we all take for granted nowadays, and one that has spawned some of the most memorable PC titles of recent years. Truth be told though, the squad-based tactical shooter is a pretty youthful genre. Bullfrog's *Syndicate* and Sensible Software's *Cannon Fodder* perhaps provided its first twinklings in the early '90s, but the tactical elements of these games were somewhat undeveloped. It was *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six* that brought tactics kicking and screaming into the shooter genre in 1998, although the 'shooter' portion of that otherwise excellent title was seen by many as lifeless and dry.

Shoot 'em up action and tactical gameplay weren't comfortable, fully-fledged bedfellows until a year later, and

the catalyst for change was Illusion Softworks, a small and hitherto unheard of development studio from the Czech Republic who released a game by the name of *Hidden & Dangerous*. Like *Commandos: Behind Enemy Lines* from the year before, *Hidden & Dangerous* put you in command of an elite Allied unit from World War II. This band of brothers – members of the SAS, no less – were tasked with embarking on dangerous covert missions deep in enemy territory, involving a healthy mix of sabotage, kidnapping, subterfuge and general Nazi ass-kicking.

However, unlike *Commandos*, *Hidden & Dangerous* was not a puzzle game, and although stealth had a part to play, there wasn't as much emphasis placed on sneaking about. Instead, it offered an

action-packed yet strategic experience, involving careful forward planning followed by a good deal of shooting and blowing things up. And what's more, it was all presented in glorious 3D.

CZECHS AND BALANCES

The team responsible for this groundbreaking title was fronted by Petr Vochozka, the youthful co-founder of Illusion Softworks, based in the Czech Republic's second largest city Brno.

The company started life in 1993 as a small publisher called Vochozka Trading, growing into a full development house four years later. Although Petr already had some experience as a games designer, having worked on several small projects within the Czech Republic, the rest of the

PROFILE

Petr is the co-founder of Illusion, and remains at the company in a development director role, overseeing projects and occasionally working on design.



NAME: Petr Vochozka
ROLE ON H&D: Development director
FIRST GAME WORKED ON:
Donkey Island

WHERE IS HE NOW?
CEO at Illusion Softworks.



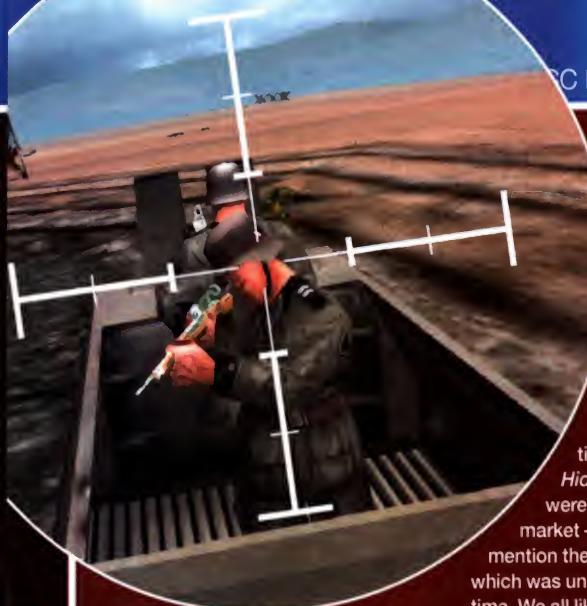
GAME *Hidden & Dangerous*

DEVELOPER Illusion Softworks

PUBLISHER Talonsoft

RELEASED 1999

INFLUENCED *Hidden & Dangerous* was one of the first 3D action strategy titles, combining shooter elements with those of squad-based tactical games. As well as foot-slogging around the huge levels, your crack SAS squad could commandeer various vehicles and capture enemy gun positions, all in an evocative World War II setting.



features if we'd been aware of the obstacles they'd generate."

The desire to innovate and to create something entirely new was pivotal at the early stages of development. Petr continues: "At the time we started work on *Hidden & Dangerous*, there were no similar titles on the market – although maybe I should mention the first *Commandos* title, which was under development at the time. We all liked action and war movies and games, and we wanted to develop something original."

And although the game didn't make it into the shops until after the release of some slightly similar titles, Petr insists that the team simply weren't in a position to take cues from them: "Shortly before release, *Special Ops* and *Rainbow Six* both appeared on the market, but I can't really say that we had time to play them and implement any changes to what we were doing."

BABY YOU CAN DRIVE MY CAR

Petr is justifiably proud of the fact that *Hidden & Dangerous* was chock-full of originality, from its interactive 3D tactical map to its healthy selection of fully driveable vehicles. Some, such as the patrol boat and armoured personnel carrier, had machine guns which could be turned on the enemy, while others enabled your squaddies to shoot their own weaponry through the windows. At one point, your men even got the opportunity to climb into a

DID YOU KNOW?

Hidden & Dangerous Deluxe (the original game and its expansion, all dolled up with prettier graphics and a mission editor) is now available as a free download from the Gathering website – www.gathering.com/hd2/hddeluxe.html. Hurrah!

"I'm most proud of the fresh ideas it brought to the way games were played"

PETR VOCHOZKA CO-FOUNDER, ILLUSION SOFTWARES



The graphics were stunning.

friendly bomber, taking pot shots at hordes of pursuing Germans as it took flight and sped them to safety. Nothing like this had been seen before in this type of game.

The interactive map, meanwhile, fulfilled two vital functions. First, it gave you an accurate, three-dimensional representation of each level, which could be rotated and zoomed into using the mouse and a set of controls. Second, it enabled you to give each man in your team a set of queued-up orders, which

was essential if you wanted to set up detailed, coordinated actions. Petr admits that map control was sometimes "problematic": you would occasionally see one of your soldiers ignoring the orders he'd been given, instead electing to run headlong into enemy fire and an untimely demise. This kind of thing made an already challenging game – *Hidden & Dangerous* was already a 'one mistake and you've failed the mission' type of deal – even more difficult.

Indeed, when asked about their memories of *Hidden & Dangerous*, many gamers mention the deadly bugs. Although Petr's keen to point out that it turned out pretty much as he wanted it to, he readily acknowledges that the game wasn't quite as refined as it could have been. "Maybe we could have added a few more months' testing and polishing," he admits with a grin. "But then again, it would always be good to have a few more months on any project."

Illusion implemented a wide variety of mission settings in *Hidden & Dangerous*, with levels taking place in landscapes as diverse as Northern Italy, Yugoslavia, and the frozen snowfields of Norway (a swashbuckling 'reimagining' of the



Prague was the memorable setting for the penultimate level.

famous operation to sabotage the Third Reich's atomic bomb programme at Telemark), as well as the German heartland. There was even one stage set entirely on a crippled, sinking battleship, with your team sent in to retrieve an Enigma decoding device before it became permanently consigned to Davy Jones' locker. In a nod to their homeland, the team also located the two final levels in Czechoslovakia: one in the shell-ravaged, sniper-infested Bohemian capital of Prague, and another in a massive airfield during a battle between the beleaguered Germans and Czechoslovakia's Soviet liberators.

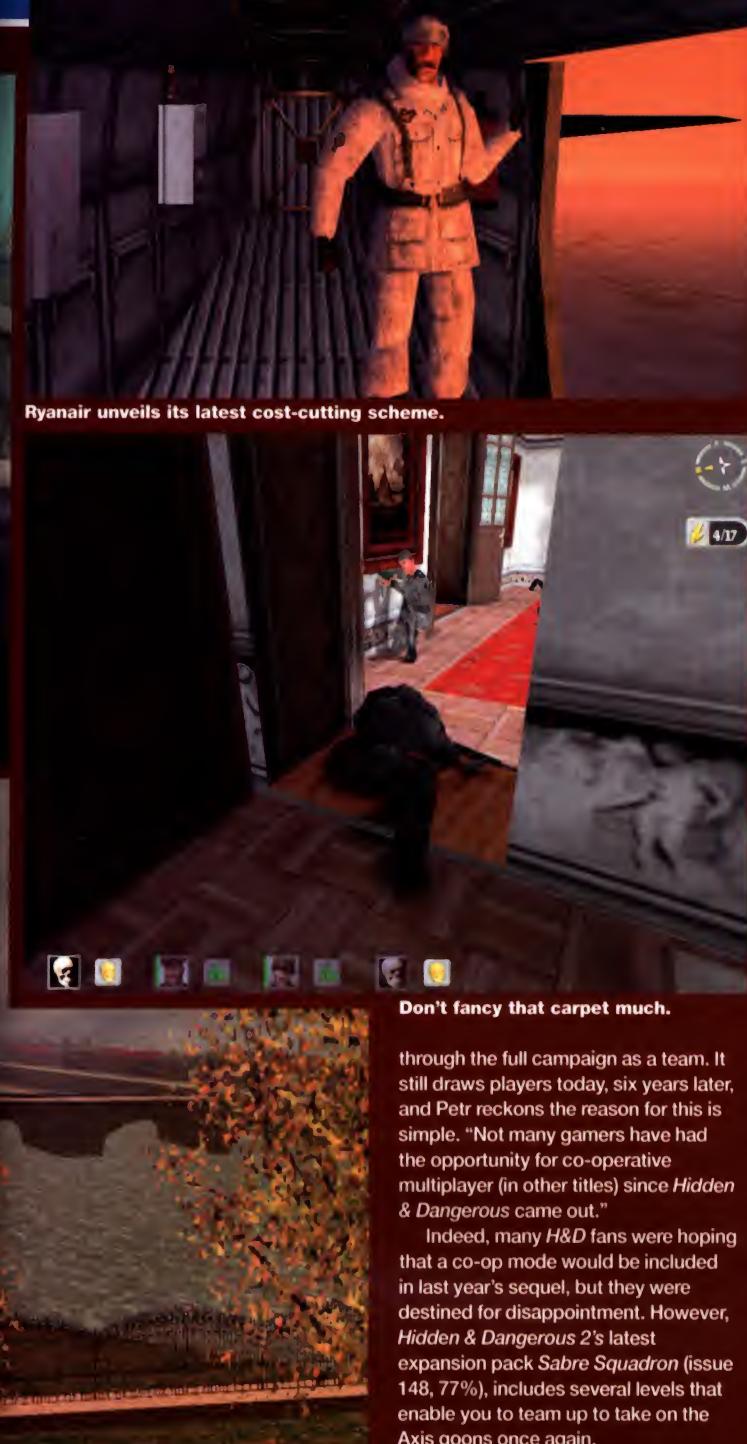
FAMOUS LAST STANDS

The gameplay in the missions varied immensely as well: some levels required

FAMILY TREE

Hidden & Dangerous might not have been the first, but it's the game that catapulted the squad-based tactical shooter into the mainstream. Its influences are obvious, but there's never been a game like it since – bar the sequel. *Rainbow Six* is harder, the *Conflict* series is a lot easier. *Hidden & Dangerous* treads the middle ground well.





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through the full campaign as a team. It still draws players today, six years later, and Petr reckons the reason for this is simple. "Not many gamers have had the opportunity for co-operative multiplayer (in other titles) since *Hidden & Dangerous* came out."

Indeed, many *H&D* fans were hoping that a co-op mode would be included in last year's sequel, but they were destined for disappointment. However, *Hidden & Dangerous 2*'s latest expansion pack *Sabre Squadron* (issue 148, 77%), includes several levels that enable you to team up to take on the Axis goons once again.

SPOILS OF WAR

Hidden & Dangerous proved to be a huge critical and commercial hit, going on to sell over a million copies. Although the developer knew that it'd created something special, the extent of its popularity still came as a surprise.

"We were strongly hoping for success, but it definitely exceeded our expectations," recalls Petr. The title's achievement also meant that Petr's dream of making Illusion Softworks the first internationally renowned Czech games developer was coming along in leaps and bounds. "It convinced our investor to put more money into the company and

stealth and cunning – the mission where your team had to disguise themselves in civvies and steal a patrol boat from a town under curfew for instance – while others called for a rather more balls-out, action approach. Petr has a particular affection for a certain type of mission.

"I do like 'defending' levels – for example, the mission Last Courtesy, where you're in the centre of a small airport and have to defend your position before your plane lands." He also cites Crystal Falcon as a favourite; this was the unforgettable mission where your four-man team had to fend off an entire armoured company – including a pair of Panzers – using only small firearms and a handful of landmines.

Hidden & Dangerous also had a number of multiplayer options, the most notable being a co-operative mode that enabled up to four players to play

THE FUTURE

BANDS OF BROTHERS

Illusion Softworks continues to support *Hidden & Dangerous 2* (which is, after all, only a year old). The recent *Sabre Squadron* expansion pack (issue 148, 77%) features a return of the beloved co-operative multiplayer mode, as well as nine new single-player missions spread across no fewer than four locales, enhanced AI and a healthy smattering of extra weapons and gear.

Meanwhile, the squad-based strategy shooter genre shows no sign of going tits up, with the Xbox's Middle East-set actionfest *Full Spectrum Warrior*, not to mention the mouth-wateringly gorgeous and supposedly ultra-authentic *Close Combat: First To Fight*. Also on the horizon is the long awaited *SWAT 4* (due early next year), as well as a sequel to *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon*. According to the developers, each of these games will push the envelope of the genre, with truly advanced friendly and enemy AI, not to mention as yet undreamt of levels of realism. We can't wait.



A Nazi, yesterday.

we were able to develop more games."

The first of these was an expansion pack for *Hidden & Dangerous*, called *Devil's Bridge* in the US and *Fight For Freedom* in Europe. It was developed and released relatively quickly (within a year in fact), adding more levels featuring improved AI and jazzed-up visuals, while keeping gameplay pretty much the same. What gamers really wanted to see was a full-blown sequel, but this would have to wait – Petr and his colleagues had other priorities.

Illusion Softworks' next PC game was the brilliant *Mafia* in 2002, which married the freedom of movement seen in titles like *Grand Theft Auto* with a compelling gangster plotline and glorious visuals, courtesy of the company's own LS3D engine. The following year saw the release of *Vietcong*, a first person shooter developed jointly by Illusion and fellow Czech studio Pterodon.

BRISTOL FASHION

Buoyed by the success of these two games, Illusion finally launched the long-awaited sequel to *Hidden & Dangerous* in late 2003. It'd been in development for over three years, hampered by the departure of the leading team members, a change of engine and a considerable about-face in direction. Initially, the game was set to revolve around a main character, Lt Gary Bristol, his exploits as the leader of an SAS unit and his personal war against an arch nemesis SS officer. However, this idea was soon (and perhaps wisely) dropped, and replaced by a return to the mission-led style of the original title.

"The two biggest problems with the original game were bugs and problematic map control, and I think that both were well resolved with the sequel," recalls Petr. "The game was totally rewritten from scratch, so this was a big achievement for us."

Indeed, the show-stopping bugs that afflicted the first game were pretty much stamped out. The new 3D map – well, it was no longer a map as such – but the actual three-dimensional action was just as detailed as you'd see from the normal first- and third-person viewpoints. What's more, you could even watch your orders being played out in real time, pausing when you wanted to issue more.

Further additions included ragdoll physics, access to a wider variety of weapons and war gear, and an RPG-style stat system whereby your squad members got more proficient at various skills as they progressed through the game. Overall though, the choice to retain a similar game style looked to be a sound one, as *Hidden & Dangerous 2* proved to be a solid success with both critics and consumers alike.

DEBRIEFING

So where now for Petr and co? Well, the team recently released the *Sabre Squadron* expansion pack for *H&D 2*, which adds more of the same squad-based action you've come to know and love. As for the next project, Petr is keeping schtum. So have we seen the last full instalment of SAS action from Illusion Softworks? "I can say that the next game from the *Hidden & Dangerous* team will not be a *Hidden & Dangerous* game," he smiles. "Maybe another team, another studio... Who knows?"

He certainly has enough on his plate steering the ship at Illusion, a company that now employs over 150 people in five different offices, including two in neighbouring Slovakia. And it's a company that's very much built on the success of *Hidden & Dangerous*, a true original. Asked what it is about the game that makes him most proud to have been part of its development, Petr doesn't hesitate. "We always try to come up with fresh ideas, not just clones; I'm most proud of all the fresh ideas it brought to the way games were played." He pauses and smiles. "Well, that and the nice graphics." 



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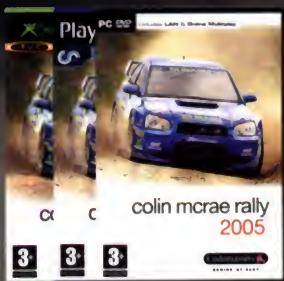
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